

cross-currents in culture ● number 16 • winter 2002 • free

variant



contents

Notes on Events	4
Die Sonne: The Sun David Appleman	6
Women Against Fundamentalisms Interview with Gita Sahgal, Southall Black Sisters	9
Cultural Bulimia John Beagles & Dave Beech	10
Anti-Semitism, Zionism, and the Palestinians Noam Chomsky	12
Communities in Resistance Michael Cropley	15
Zine & Comic Reviews Mark Pawson	18
Lost in France Ian Brotherhood	20
Concrete Social Interventions e-mail exchange with artists' group WochenKlausur	24
Out For The Night Martha Brophy	26
Making Waves Martha Brophy	27
Cube culture: Exploding the frames of cinema in Bristol Ben Slater	29
The Project meets The Office Managerialism in UK Plc. Paul Taylor	31
This Year's Module Peter Suchin	34
Tired of the Soup du Jour? Some problems with 'New Sculpture' Nick Evans	35
City of Culture: We mean it Literally John Gray	38

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Notes on Events

Through the Looking Glass Leigh French

Since the Scottish Arts Council's threat of legal action against Variant (detailed in the last issue) and after a long awaited meeting, the SAC commissioned an independent assessment of Variant from Andrew Brighton of Tate Modern. The exact purpose for commissioning the report was unclear. We were told that it could not be used in our attempted appeal against the SAC and that (regardless of its content) it would not inform SAC funding decisions: it was for the 'director's own personal use'. In a generous act, the SAC allowed Brighton to release his findings to Variant. It transpired that of prime importance to Brighton was trying to explain to the SAC the workings of Variant as an artist-run project. The report overwhelmingly championed Variant and concluded that if the SAC was going to support Variant it should support it for what it is. Clearly such beliefs don't sit comfortably within a climate of exhaustively managed Culture. (The report is available on the Variant web site www.variant.org.uk)

Since then the SAC Visual Arts Dept. has informed us that it has come to their attention that there's a 'gap in the market' for an art magazine in Scotland. This moot point is not an admission of a failure on their part to support critical writing. Rather, sidestepping their historical culpability, their aping of market rhetoric serves to conflate market priorities with cultural priorities as justification for now acting.

To corroborate their 'gap', the SAC has bought in the services of the well-worked "research expertise" company ScotInform. In a letter from the Visual Arts Dept. we were told ScotInform would be contacting Variant for access to our data-bases to enable them to carry out their research, and that this research would go on to inform some hazy intention to establish an art magazine in Scotland. ScotInform did contact us: we had been identified to participate in their survey of art magazines based in the UK. We responded by asking for ScotInform's brief from the SAC in full as we wished to know exactly what process we were being engaged in, for what purposes, if there were any projected outcomes as there seemed to be, and how this was going to benefit existing (unsupported) projects in this field, like Variant? (Given the SAC's alleged inability to support this area in the past, we'd also like to know just how much ScotInform are being paid out of Cultural resources for their services?) We still haven't been given the answers to these questions.

As part of ScotInform's research, a closed meeting was held where a small group of invited artists & gallerists were asked to express their views on 'an art magazine for Scotland.' Those gathered were told the 14% increase in arts funding in England, though expected in Scotland and allegedly to be used to fund such a magazine, was not going to be reciprocated by the Scottish Executive. As a result, funding for this magazine would come out of existing SAC resources. In return for supposedly having their funding eaten into, the implication is an uncritical, 'celebratory' association between the magazine and those organisations deemed to have forfeited something in this transaction.

Variant have been told that the model for this magazine put forward by ScotInform & SAC was a confused hotchpotch of 'everything' from applied art to fine art photography; it would incorporate the urban and the rural, and include a market section, an international section, listings, opportunities, etc. (These strands seemed to result from ScotInform's interpretation of a phone poll they conducted, the objectivity of which needs to be examined in itself.) Because ScotInform seemingly have little experience of the area they are dealing

with, they made the mistake of assuming that these elements are editorially benign and that they will combine seamlessly because they are 'Scottish', and to a much lesser extent 'contemporary'.

It would be fair to say that their model for the magazine seemed to have altered little from the beginning of the meeting to their summing up at the end, despite criticisms. The impression is that ScotInform fundamentally lacked an appreciation of the complexities of what they were dealing with. Evident was a naïve assumption of some sort of unified Scottish arts community, with the SAC as the legitimising body of this consolidation of mutual self-interest. (That old chestnut of you don't just control production but also distribution, and importantly here the circulation and reception of ideas.)

What's exposed by these shenanigans is a highly conservative view (or suppression) of what might actually constitute the sites of 'Visual Art' and what forms and focuses a cultural magazine might independently take: that it might take them independently at all. It would seem that under a guise of market-necessity, pseudo-populism and public-accountability 'Culture' is only that which is officially allowed to be. Does it really need to be spelt out that artists' practises are not utterly contained by national boundaries, phantasmic markets, illusory departmental designations, or the control of bureaucratic functionaries?

Further evidence of adverse interference within the 'Cultural sector' (this time as a more blatant result of coerced public/private 'partnership' models of funding) is the utter farce surrounding the title of a recent exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. The show of mainly Vancouver-based artists, many of Scottish descent, was sponsored by Standard Life Investments. On hearing that the show was to be titled 'Homesick' Standard Life intervened. Not wanting the slightest chance of being miss-associated with the word 'sick' they asked the curator and artists to change the title to something more acceptable to their brand image. ("In October, [Standard Life] cut the maturity payouts on 2.1m pensions and endowment policies by 10% and imposed an additional 10% penalty on those wanting to cash in their policy early." *Guardian*, 30.11.02) Sadly for the artists, gallery, and contemporary Scottish art scene, the result of this intervention was another innocuous title for what was (in part) an interesting exhibition, and the Fruitmarket Gallery and public funding in Scotland being the butt of ridicule in Vancouver. Similarly, when EasyJet sponsored the Fruitmarket they inflicted a sizable bright orange banner advertising cheap flights to Amsterdam across the bottom of the show's posters and invitation cards.

Clearly, we should criticise the Fruitmarket for these crass commercial deals which raise fundamental questions about freedom of expression and corporate power, but ultimate responsibility lies higher up the ladder. Those overseeing the stripping back of arms-length public funding are replacing it with a structure which exposes such galleries to unnecessary and totally disproportionate corporate influence. As a result, such galleries are being brought about to serve flagrant commercial and political interests.

The generating of private revenue as an essential requirement to receive public funding recently left its squalid mark elsewhere in Scotland, exposing the contradictions of a supposed liberal Cultural scene...

Centre for Contemporary Armaments Gair Dunlop

"We glorify war as the sole hygiene....."
Marinetti, Futurist manifesto.

The CCA in Glasgow may be modest about its programme; all the more surprising that one of the more notable gatherings in the building recently has gone without mention in its publicity.

A seminar organised by Scottish Enterprise and the Ministry of Defence on Thursday 3rd October featured Anthony Ingram MP (Minister of State for the Armed Forces), representatives from Nobel Industries, The Defence Export Services Organisation, Defence Supply Service, and representatives from the Glasgow Universities, mingling with Glasgow's would-be body bag suppliers and weapons makers. The Defence Diversification Agency exists to diffuse the expertise from Britain's defence laboratories into industry, and vice versa.

A session on "the inventor and the MOD" featured exemplary tales such as that of the man who invented a new hygienic non/piercing syringe, now used for mass inoculation in the US and UK armies. Unfortunately the "percent for art" formula was not applied to this public gathering; artists use of the building was strictly confined to CCA6 where Bill Drummond's journey from Southampton to Dounreay traced parallel lines of nuclear force.

When the CCA re-opened [after a Lottery refurbishment], many of us felt a bit puzzled: there seemed to be little extra functional space, and a corporate style atrium cafe which squeezed artists out. Even more startling was the news that this mismatch of environment to its expected uses was up for major architectural prizes.

Now it's clear that these reservations were due to our complete misunderstanding of the purpose of Lottery revamps on arts structures. The hermetically sealed CCA5 makes a secure and confidential venue for any variety of military-industrial encounters. Assorted nooks and spaces make for quiet discussion zones, and excellent service from the cafe sweetens each encounter.

It's good to see the CCA devoting its soul to the necessary expenditure on future mayhem. But why leave artists out? If British Airways can commission a series of ethnic tailfins, think what contemporary artists could do with an F16. Defoliants have huge possibilities in Land Art. And a chic desert camouflage motif on the CCA cafe cups will convey an ideal zeitgeist punch this autumn. Why shouldn't artists get their hands on the incredible beauty represented in the apocalypses of tomorrow?

The above polemic appeared on the *Ambit* email discussion group and rapidly spread. What became apparent was a widespread sense of unease amongst artists relating to the question of space, and in particular the abandonment of the idea of public space. Several other strands of coping behaviour also emerged: liberal seeing-both-sides, denial, and from the CCA a surface response of seeking dialogue, with simultaneous threats of dismissal for any staff who talked about it.

Voice of Ambit List Moderator: I'm very aware that the subscribers to this list are being asked to make moral judgements on a variety of issues surrounding the CCA and this seminar based on minimal information.

Does anybody have hard info on this seminar — for example an agenda, delegate pack, handout? If not, can we obtain some information from CCA?

Gair, it's not that I don't believe you, but you are asking everyone to take a lot on trust here. I don't think clarity is helped by your mix of factoids, polemic, satire and humour: effective as a critique perhaps, but more information is needed.

Gair Dunlop: My intention was solely to help the CCA promote this radical "new audience" initiative.

Let's show the world we mean business when we invoke a social inclusion agenda...

I wonder if some of the undoubted surprise about

this is due to artists’ thinking that somehow artspace and civilspace are immune from the war forces of the moment. Well it would seem they’re not.

Response from Mandy Macintosh: so my reaction is quite sad really, i mean one day i was passing [the CCA] and popped in and the Scottish Football Association had taken over the front and cafe so i couldnt even getnear the cappuccinos for trays full of vol au vents.

i mean basically it wasnt open to the public and this was mid week afternoon. so that was annoying and a bitnaff but this is just really crass now, and i cant imagine it being tolerated in other equivalent uk venues in manchester, london,bristol etc. so why here?

i couldnt boycott every venue or warn every future artistaboutmalpractice or questionable association taking place there, i use domineering technology, i fly on aeroplanes, bla bla, we all participate in messy fucked up compromising things, but when a particular item is pointed out to you like Gair did here and you see it as emblematic of something kind of bigger and more insidious than how it actually appears on paper then i want to know more about it and i dont want it to drift past.

No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail spectacularly (No sanctuary from caricature,parody and oblivion...)

Daniel Jewesbury

This has been a year of mixed messages and unfulfilled commitments for the arts in Ireland, a hubristic year, on both sides of the border. As great plans wither on the vine and funding bodies fail once again to present a co-ordinated approach to cultural policy and provision, artists are left wondering what the ‘criteria’ are that they’re meant to be fulfilling. One thing is left unchanged by this year of reversals and terminations: artists continue to be the last to know.

When Arthouse, then the Multimedia Centre for the Arts, was conceived of more than a decade ago, artists in Dublin (and across Ireland) were unsure what the new centre would either be or do. Many felt that a huge new venue for an artform that had yet to define itself was not only premature but remarkably ill-judged; at that time the word ‘multimedia’ was still applied to work that used video and sound, and the idea that artists who couldn’t even get access to facilities to work in these media would somehow embrace ‘digital art’ (whatever that was or is) was surely a peculiar one. There’s no innovation without experimentation, of course, but as the twin edifices overshadowing the new Curved Street were completed, many felt that the manner in which the Multimedia Centre had been developed was characteristic of the lack of consultation in the Temple Bar project as a whole. Arthouse opened far behind schedule and (much to the surprise of those venturing in for the first time) with no dedicated exhibition space. From the very beginning this was one of the main problems with the building (for the building became synonymous with the entity it housed); where was its centre? While shows were hung awkwardly in the reception area, the café became the only effective and frequented space in the building.

There’s no point going over the details of Arthouse’s demise once again, five months after the event.Even the dogs in the street know that story, as we say in Belfast. We know also that it’s naïve to assume that lessons will be learnt from the calamitous demise of such ill-defined, ill-used facilities. If you’ve got a big idea, the last thing you want is a rabble of scruffy creative types telling you it just won’t work.

“The traffic lights, and yellow lines, and the illuminated signs, that all say ‘welcome to the borough that everybody’s pleased in’...”

Willie Rushton, ‘Neasden’

And so to Imagine Belfast, or the fiasco of an aborted renaissance. In this issue of Variant, John Gray, librarian of the Linen Hall library, points out that the failure of Belfast’s bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2008 was only a surprise to those who compiled it. Those dogs on the street had sensed that here was another grand project that would fail because it had no connection with the activity that already existed in the city. The grandiloquent schemes described in Imagine’s bizarre bid document mentioned only selectively, and then in passing, those organisations whose sole work in the past ten, twenty or thirty years has been putting culture in the recovery position and stopping it from swallowing its tongue. The bid, ‘One Belfast’, was almost perverse in its naivety, acknowledging on the one hand the massive social and political problems, the fragmentations and dissolutions and blindness that cripple Belfast (Belfast is a city ‘acquainted with grief’,as one Biblical passage in the bid would have it), whilst proposing on the other that we could wish all these away with a ‘culture’ that would heal the wounds and, more importantly, get the cash registers chiming (in unison, obviously). No one could agree what this vision of ‘culture’ was, least of all the team of Imagine Belfast, as John Gray points out. The desire to make Belfast a ‘whole’ city is a laudable one; it deserves more to see it to realisation than the platitudinous pledges of a pack of PR consultants:

“YetEurope is still a continent with boundaries, barriers and borders. In Belfast we have our walls. We are one of the last cities in Western Europe to be divided by ‘peacelines’. But we have other walls too. Invisible walls, between men and women, rich and poor, young and old. The culture of barriers will end.

“We will cultivate the arts of infiltration,transparency and transgression. We will come through not in ones and twos, but in our thousands. We will bring others to come through. From Ireland and Britain and Europe, we will bring the people who suffer and fret and remember, and we will bring them through what were our walls and barriers.

“We will reconnect our populations.

We will cement conciliation.

We will replace the peace lines with peace.

We will bring down the walls of Belfast.

We will embed our peace in the fabric of the city and in the conscience of Europe...

“One Belfast:

The whole various, unexpected,unreliable,dependable, unruly, uproarious, threatening, stubborn, generous, violent,scary, hospitable,perverse,cack-handed city in a bucketbetween sea and hill.”

What many found particularly galling about Imagine’s schemes was the application of ‘cultural’ activity to the ends of inward investment and economic and social regeneration. This instrumentalised approach to culture is to be found in any city desperately trying to reinvent itself after years of industrial or social decay, so it’s hardly a surprise that it’s become virulent across the North in the last eight years. But the collective sigh of relief that many artists released when the bid failed was a recognition of the fact that culture is not a panacea, something exclusively benign that speaks to everyone and no-one.

Early on in the bidding process,poet-in-exile Tom Paulin rowed in behind the bid with a proposal that Belfast’s real ‘culture’ was to be found in the patterns of its vernacular, something which Imagine seized on and incorporated into their document. Their hugely Imaginative proposal was that a different ‘word of the day’ from English,

Irish or Ulster Scots would be featured on billboards across town during 2008. This seems to epitomise the way in which the bid conceptualised the future for Belfast; the only way forward, it proclaimed, is in the policy of ‘equal but different’, a kind of cultural power-sharing in which all cultures are to be valued and none to be questioned. In the post-ceasefire,post-Agreement climate, ‘culture’ is used cannily by all seeking to gain political advantage; it’s one of the few weapons that doesn’t have to be decommissioned. The frenzied rush to acclaim Ulster Scots as a ‘language’,and thus a marker of a truly different ‘culture’ within the North, is a testament to this. Culture has always been implicated in the grand crimes and petty misdemeanours of history, and so it goes on.

Tom, it was a load of auld boke.

Variant has secured funding towards the nextthree issues from Awards for All in Northern Ireland, and we will be developing a broad range of content from Ireland and Britain over the coming year. In particular we will be organising an event in Belfast early in 2003, exploring the huge variety of small arts publishing that goes on in these islands. The next issue will extend our collaborations with organisations across Ireland, drawing in new contexts and debates and further broadening the magazine’s remit.

Die Sonne: The Sun

David Appleman

It was while photographing psychiatric hospitals in Eastern Germany that I first heard of the name Sonnenstein (pronounced Zonnenstein) and its association with Nazi euthanasia centres. Up until this point the small idyllic town of Pirna in the heart of the Saxony region was a singular identity and quite unconnected with my interest in hospital institutions. Yet it was at another hospital that of Arnsdorf that I was to be introduced to the reality of the hidden and secret past of Sonnenstein.

I had already visited this hospital some four months earlier and photographed the many ward buildings with their overtly Germanic, geometric figures. On returning to my car I noticed out of the corner of my eye a memorial plaque that I had not remembered seeing on my first encounter with Arnsdorf. The plaque, possibly recently erected had the name Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler inscribed in gold letters on it. A date 4.12.89 - 31.7.40 and the name Sonnenstein accompanied the inscription. Standing in front of this epitaph I decided to find out more of Sonnenstein and who Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler was and why she had died there.

Whilst researching at the Deutsches Hygiene Museum in Dresden and by referring to original journals I traced Sonnenstein back to 1922 when as a Heil und Pflegeanstalt (care and cure institution) it had originally housed 672 psychiatric patients. Sonnenstein's history over the decades like the other hospitals, Großschweidnitz, Arnsdorf and Bühlau that it shared its pages with, seemed at first glance unassuming enough. But then I noticed that it had suddenly closed in 1939. A year later Sonnenstein reopened its doors and by order of The General Foundation for Welfare and Institutional Care (Die Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Heil und Anstaltspflege), a state run medical agency, Sonnenstein became a special hospital to undertake medical experimentation and euthanasia.

Early in 1940 an organisation called T4 visited every mental hospital and psychiatric clinic in Germany to 'observe' each patient for evaluation and selection for the now in place euthanasia centres.¹ Sonnenstein was not unique as five other main centres were also by now staffed and operational.

Elfriede I learnt had been a patient at Arnsdorf, when one day a group of T4 specialists arrived at the hospital. Few staff and patients would have suspected the true identity of the visitors and the real reason for their journey, nor the eventual outcome of their mission. On inspection of the hospital register she too was among those selected for observation. Under the Nazis ideology of 'life unfit for life' thousands of individuals, those viewed as a 'burden to society' and therefore a drain on resources, the mentally ill and mentally handicapped as well as the elderly and those with incurable illnesses were to be taken from the many institutions and transported to the awaiting death centres. Elfriede was one of up to 100,000

individuals (the true figure is unknown) removed from Germany's hospitals.

I left Dresden (the birth place of Elfriede) where I was staying, and embarked on the thirty kilometer drive to Anstalt-Pirna that would roughly trace the route taken by those expelled from Arnsdorf some sixty years ago. At this point I still did not know if the buildings at Sonnenstein were still standing or even what had become of it over the years. While travelling my emotions seemed to heighten and become more aware. Lucid images of those confused at leaving their only refuge or for some the excitement of a promised holiday that was not to be, flowed uncomfortably through my mind.

As the winter sun flickered between the buildings of each successive small village that passed, I wondered, had they seen what I was seeing and had they known what I already knew? I was later disturbed to read that the windows on the buses in transport were blacked out. And unlike those from the institutions on route to Sonnenstein I knew where this journey would end.

At first on arrival at Pirna, I failed to spot the large buildings which lurked in the background of a protective village and resembled a stately home much less a killing centre. It looked so inconspicuous, but there it was, Sonnenstein. I climbed a series of stone stairs into the small estate which was surrounded by about four or five main buildings. It was a strange looking structure, the front profile was fortified like a castle yet at its rear the ground levelled out and was accessible by a small road which provided a natural terminus directly in front of the main buildings. This is where, several times a week, those arriving from catchment areas such as Sachsen, Thuringen, Franken, Schlesien, the Sudeten area, as well as transports from East and West Prussia would have disembarked.

I approached a doorway at the nearest building, which I was surprised to find was unlocked for some reason. So I entered Sonnenstein. The building I found myself in had been empty for many years, nevertheless it had been preserved much as it had been left. The long ashen coloured corridors with their lofty ceilings trailed into the distance and were sporadically interspersed by thick archways. Small windows illuminated the passageway and led to each of the individual rooms, which were also large and capacious. Over all it looked functional and purposeful.

I spent over two hours walking around Sonnenstein's airless interior trying to uncover its past, but the ghosts had long left this place, covered up to be forgotten. The lifeless building, no longer sentient, held few memories of what had once taken place here back in 1940. What had I really expected to discover and what of Elfriede who was the reason for my searching of Sonnenstein in the first instance? It all seemed so delusive trying to identify one single person where so many were held, yet all are now unreachable because there are no records, no witnesses



that they have ever existed. I knew that for all the men, women and children who entered this building, there was simply no trace.

Six months had passed since I had returned home somewhat disappointed that Sonnenstein had failed to yield its former secrets. I was frustrated to have abandoned my story unfinished, when one morning I received a news paper article from Dresden which described the plans for an exhibition and a workshop for the disabled which had recently opened at Sonnenstein. As part of the exhibition, biographies of 22 former inmates were to be displayed. At the foot of the feature was printed the name of one patient: Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler.

I realised that although I had been in the Sonnenstein centre, I had not entered the sections known as C 16. These parts of the building by agreement have remained unused and are rarely visited. It was within one of the disused rooms of C16 that the mobile gas chamber and crematorium (which would have been screened off from the eyes of the victims) had operated.

Yet with innate clarity one could envisage how nearly 15,000 people had been murdered in the solitary three story building of C16. One would be surprised to realise how little space is required to facilitate the killing of so many people. The whole operation which required technical specialists, support staff, administrators, clerks, carers, doctors, nurses and the special command (police) at the institution's gate amounted to no more than a mere 100 staff. As I reflected on the empty room I could see them rapt, silently working away, the smooth cotton of their white coats concealing the coarseness of their grey regulation uniforms.

This gives one an insight, incredulously as it may seem into the Nazi process for extermination and just how proficient it actually was. It could be argued today that the difficulty for many people (albeit few would deny) in accepting the sheer scale of the actions of the Nazis is the fact that whether statistically or in reality; conceiving of these things is still difficult for many.

Sonnenstein was closed in 1941 after the cessation of the official euthanasia program. Wild euthanasia, especially of children continued until 1945.² This was not before a secret directive from Berlin, known as 'Aktion 14f 13', committed to death by euthanasia thousands of mental defectives, the incurably ill / insane, criminals and Jews



FAR LEFT:
Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, 1920
CENTRE LEFT:
Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, 1922
NEAR LEFT:
Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, 1928

who had been sent via the various concentration camps.³ It was the chilling first step in the collaboration between the euthanasia centres and the concentration camps, and the progression towards what would become the systematic execution of millions in the new extermination camps.

The seemingly unimaginable number of deaths, estimated somewhere between 11 and 15 million (which became the holocaust) proposed by the Nazi Government had also been potentially realised through the research carried out within the euthanasia programs. The methods or more so the aptitude for killing which had been devised, developed and tested in the euthanasia centres were in 1942 transferred to the secret, purpose built extermination camps of Poland. In Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka (Chelmno & Auschwitz were already operational) the technological legacy of euthanasia (gassing) would be further perfected to that of mass genocide on an unimaginable scale.⁴

It is generally accepted that the sequence of events that we now refer to as the holocaust were premeditated, to be initiated by powerful bureaucrats in the Nazi hierarchy and delivered by the party elite: the SS - Schutzstaffel (protection squad). The killing system had to be flexible and in practice relied far more on the individual personalities and the dispositions of those involved than any rigid system. It is only when we view these separate stages of the holocaust that we can see an overall plan.

It is no mere coincidence that from the close of the main euthanasia centres around 1941, the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) then began its biggest campaigns against civilians. Poland's mental hospitals, institutions and sanatoriums had already been cleared by the Einsatzgruppen (SS death squads), who followed closely behind the main occupational troops.⁵ One year into the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941; 750,000 civilians had been killed.

As in Poland, Russia's hospitals were also ransacked and its patients disposed of by the SS and former T4 operatives.⁶ In Russia, the gas vans that proved so instrumental in the euthanasia program and the deaths of the mentally ill now drove a 'new victim' relentlessly for miles, until they were dead. The final death toll of (Russian) Jews would be in the millions. Most were shot but the increased use of gassing as a chosen means of extermination had played an active part; and would continue to do so.

In January of 1942 at the Wannsee conference, Ministers and Nazi leaders proposed a final solution draft to the 'Jewish problem'. Their decision culminated in Operation Reinhard. In May of 1942, the same year as Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka II, Chelmno (Kulmhof) and Auschwitz Birkenau came into being, the SS battalions of Operation Reinhard were mobilised.⁷ Assisted at times by the Wehrmacht (army) the Einsatz Kommando units started to round up, with systematic intent, the millions of individuals who would be transported (or killed on the spot) to the awaiting extermination camps. Albeit the numerous 'aktionen' were intended primarily to drive the



Jewish populace to the death camps; tens of thousands of people from other ethnic and social groups also became victims of the SS purges.

All the camps that had the euthanasia centers (whose sole objective was to kill) used gas as the agent to dispatch its victims. Appointed as heads to the camps at Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka II, Chelmno and Auschwitz Birkenau were those who had previously worked in T4. Absorbed and then consumed in the inferno; whole communities, their culture, history and (most precious) their lives were lost forever to the dictator regime.

Are we guilty too in forgetting them and not seeing our fellow human being? Of course we are not. But it was designed by the Nazis that we should. As with the euthanasia centres and extermination camps it was the intention to erase all traces of the individual, their actual death and in many cases even the person's past identity. When one views the monochrome photographs of the Nazi camps, these anomalous images of bodies hardly recognisable as our own, and notes their impersonal titles—'victims', 'removing the dead', 'survivors'—one sees another dimension of Nazi philosophy: their deliberate desire to not only destroy the human being but also the human spirit.

Yet these holocaust deaths do not stand alone as a single genus or a single event nor were the violations perpetrated solely by one individual group against one distinct individual. The largest group of individuals to have suffered from the racial policies of National Socialist doctrine were Jewish (approximately 6 million deaths). One of the lesser groups and often the least remembered were those identified as disabled, elderly, handicapped and mentally ill.

In the post war years with the focus firmly fixed on the anti-Fascist hero and the ensuing

Cold War, Sonnenstein's victims were quickly forgotten. The future generations were not told of individuals such as Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler and the thousands of other murdered (psychiatric) patients. Obscured by the secrets of a dark past, their identities have remained hidden.

Although my thoughts are of Elfriede and it is she I search for, I feel that we have lost her forever. For from within the shadows of that spiritless room in C16, a multitude of unidentified and unnamed faces clamber through my mind. I am engulfed by the pleas of their lament which pursues me from their darkness, and whose (own) voices ask with a defenceless whisper; 'what about me?' Although I now realise that I will never find her, it is with Elfriede (who initially, yet unintentionally led me to the story of Sonnenstein) that I will conclude my story.

Elfriede was born in 1899, into the comforts of a respected middle class family. Her father, Gustav Adolf Wächtler, a salesman had high hopes for his cultured daughter. Elfriede's hunger to pursue a serious artistic career developed during her teenage years, much to her father's frustration. Gustav Wächtler disapproved of his daughter's choice of career. Elfriede nonetheless enrolled at the Dresden School of Applied Art in 1915 to study fashion design. Quickly changing her course, she joined the department of applied graphics. As a young artist, Elfriede swiftly escaped from the control of her father and started to explore her new life. In 1916 (still only seventeen) she moved into her own apartment. The short bob hairstyle and the unorthodox manly apparel (cap and pipe) worn by Elfriede soon got her noticed among her peers. Her relationship with her father however had practically ceased. Elfriede would only visit her family when he was not present.

A talented artist of astute character, Elfriede



continued her profession under the guidance of Oskar Georg Erler (professor of art) and produced work in many media, including porcelain pendants and lithographic greeting cards, which she sold to finance her studies. Adopting the pseudonym ‘Nikolaus’ in an attempt to promote her reputation, Elfriede mingled with the avant garde of her generation and made significant connections with such established artists as Conrad Felixmüller, Otto Dix and Otto Griebel. She met Kurt Lohse (an art student) through one such encounter with Johannes Baader (Dada movement) and Lohse practically moved in with Wächtler. Married in 1921, Kurt struggled to provide for Elfriede, and her disappointment in Kurt weakened an already temperamental relationship.

The couple lived apart while Elfriede worked in other cities and then later by choice. Albeit married to Elfriede, Kurt fathered three illegitimate children between 1927 and 1930. Kurt resented Elfriede’s independence and craved a subordinate wife, who would stay at home and produce a family. Increasingly isolated by Kurt and by the couple’s friends, who rallied to Kurt’s side, Elfriede’s marriage and her mental state started to fall apart. Kurt on his part further dis-

played his indignation towards his wife by giving her finished canvases to his art students to paint over.

In 1929 while residing in Hamburg, Elfriede, troubled by her relationship worries and personal debts, suffered a serious nervous breakdown and was hospitalised. (Always the artist) Elfriede produced a series of sketches portraying psychiatric patients. She emerged two months later to start (according to many) the most successful period of her career as an artist. Elfriede’s resilient nature fortified her and in May of 1929, she held her first major exhibition (a collection of her hospital portraits) at the Kunstsalon Marie Kunde. Lacking funds, Elfriede economised and worked in water colour and pastel. She produced a large volume of work from allegorical fantasy scenes to the reality of life in Hamburg’s notorious red-light district.

More exhibitions and favourable reviews followed but her success was short-lived. Germany was sunk in economic depression and about to face the politics of anew era—that of Nazism. From the early 1930s, until her admission to a mental hospital in 1932, Elfriede’s life was one of near poverty and periodic homelessness. Alone and vulnerable, she returned to her parents’

home.

In June of 1932 Elfriede was committed (on her father’s request) to Arnsdorf psychiatric hospital, and subsequently diagnosed as having schizophrenia.⁸ During her formative years at the institution (she found hospital life quite unbearable), Elfriede remained optimistic towards her future and continued with her sketches.⁹ Between 1932 and 1934, she frequently wrote to her parents in the hope that they would request her release from Arnsdorf.

In May 1935, the institution became Elfriede’s legal guardian. Refusing to be sterilised, the hospital no longer permitted her to visit her parents which she had done for one week each year. Hence in 1935, Elfriede was forcibly sterilised by order of the ‘Law for the prevention of Genetically Defective Offspring’ in Dresden Friedrichstadt, a general hospital. Her human spirit broken by the sterilisation, Elfriede ceased her art work. Seven months later Kurt Lohse divorced her.

From 1939, Elfriede’s only meals were thin soups. Coupled with the hospital’s lack of care towards its patients and suffering the effects of malnutrition due to her starvation diet, Elfriede’s physical health deteriorated. Despite this, she remained mentally resolute and on the 5th March 1940, sent an Easter postcard (which she had drawn) to her mother. Elfriede’s Easter card entitled Blumenstück (the flower arrangement) read: “Don’t be afraid anymore, things will be fine again”. “I’m also looking forward to your visit.” On the 31st July 1940 (five months later), Elfriede died in the gas chamber of Pirna-Sonnenstein. Many of her sketches drawn at Arnsdorf were destroyed as degenerative art.

Today we have the paintings and sketches drawn by Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler; whom as a young woman dared to be different and dream of artistic acclaim, yet would not live to enjoy her success.¹⁰ Through these art works, we can share in her personality, aspirations and her thoughts.¹¹ Her work is her testament and allows us to appreciate the richness of her talent and of her life.

notes

1. T4: the code name for the euthanasia program was derived from the address of the chancellery headquarters at Tiergartenstrasse No. 4 in Berlin.
2. In Autumn of 1940, 145 children from Katharinenhof, an institution in Saxony run by The National Society of the Home Mission for Children were taken to Sonnenstein and gassed. The remaining children were later transferred to the state institution Großschweidnitz (a psychiatric hospital) and starved or killed by medication. The story of the children of Katharinenhof Großhennerdorf is recounted in the commemorative book: Erinnerung Wi(e)der Vergessen (1997) by Dr. Boris Böhm.
3. ‘Aktion 14f13’: A program to reduce the numbers of those identified as ‘undesirable’ or ‘asocial’ from within the concentration camps. At Sonnenstein on July 28 1941 575 inmates from Auschwitz concentration camp were killed by lethal injection. ‘Aktion 14f13’ was known by camp inmates as Operation Invalid.
4. Chelmno (Kulmhof): A ‘test experiment’ using gas took place on Dec 8th 1941. Previous ‘test experiments’ were performed on mental patients and then on Russian prisoners of war. Chelmno has its own euthanasia legacy in being the first extermination site to make use of the gas vans.

5. Two publications: History Of The SS by G.S Graber (1979) and SS Intelligence: The Nazi Secret Service, Edmund L Blandford (2000) go into detail to explain the intricacies of the SS and its own association within the Einsatzgruppen and SD. Regarding the complexities of genocide with specific reference to the activities of the supporting Police battalions and the Einsatzgruppen: Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans And The Holocaust by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (1996). This extensive historical account also comments on the politics of the euthanasia project.
6. The first psychiatric patients to be murdered were probably Polish, as a result of Nazi occupation. By November 1939 over 4,000 asylum inmates were dead (Alan Farmer: Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust - p 68, 87). Throughout occupied Europe and Germany, mental hospitals / institutions and sanatoriums were cleared and their inhabitants murdered. Albeit not always officially within the T4 programme, these ‘aktionen’ were part of the overall and deliberate extermination of the mentally and physically ill.
7. Auschwitz-Birkenau: The first camp (Auschwitz I) was originally built in April 1940 as a labour / concentration camp. An extermination camp (Auschwitz II) at Birkenau was later added with gas chambers and crematorium and became operational in March 1942.

8. Literary sources are cautious to suggest that Elfriede was schizophrenic. At Hamburg (1929) a diagnosis for this illness proved unfounded.
9. With limited resources, she would re-use paper, frugally drawing around a previous image; such was her passion for sketching.
10. In recent years the works of Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler have gained increasing popularity. The majority of her pieces (preserved by her younger brother Hubert, 1911 -1988) have been exhibited throughout Germany and in the USA. These works are held by an association (Förderkreis), an artists’ collective who further Elfriede’s achievements. Single works are retained in private collections.
11. Elfriede’s work can be viewed in three key publications: Im Malstrom des Lebens Versunken by Georg Reinhardt. Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler Leben und Werk, (an extensive monograph) edited by Georg Reinhardt, depicting 156 monochrome illustrations and colour plates. Also: das oft aufsteigende Gefühl das Verlassenseins by Hildegard Reinhart, depicting sketches of psychiatric patients and other works. There is a biography; In Jammer und Schmerz ist sie verloschen - die Malerin Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler (1889 - 1940) with photographs of Elfriede, written by Dr. Boris Böhm in the publication Euthanasie—Verbrechen in Sachsen. (All of these texts are in German, yet the images are in their own right rewarding).

Women Against Fundamentalisms

Gita Sahgal is a writer, activist and broadcaster, originally from India and now settled in England. She has been an active member of *Southall Black Sisters* and *Women against Fundamentalisms*. This year she came to speak at Glasgow University in the *Series on Gender and Globalisation* organised by the International Centre for Gender & Women's Studies. Robin Sen spoke to her there.

Robin Sen: Can you tell me about your work with *Southall Black Sisters*?

Gita Sahgal: I'm not a member of *Southall Black Sisters* now but I was a very active member for a good ten years. They're very important as they're a secular, largely Asian, organisation which have served the community in Southall on issues of domestic violence and all the related issues: poverty, immigration, policing etc. which come out around that. What's particularly important about the group is that while we were secular, we drew people from Sikh, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, and that's one of the joys of being in Britain, that you can make these cross connections. Now new refugees have come into the area, so for example you have Somali women coming in using the centre.

The organisation has also worked a lot with the local estates where there are a lot of mixed race kids. For instance, there are white working class mothers of black sons who were getting into trouble with the police, and *Southall Black Sisters* have worked with them on a number of issues.

We were also involved in the founding of a group called *Women Against Fundamentalisms* around the time of the Rushdie Affair in 1989. We felt it was important to stress that the group were working in the context of Britain as a Christian state. So the problem is not just of fundamentalisms within minority religions but that the actual structure of the state is Christian—it has a blasphemy law, it protects Christianity, it enforces acts of Christian worship in schools. So we were arguing with other women about the way multiculturalism in Britain was used to police and silence minorities, rather than produce a genuine mixing of people who could challenge the orthodoxies within their own communities.

RS: As an Asian woman, working within a secular feminist tradition, is it hard to find an identity within the Asian community as an atheist?

GS: I don't think so because there are plenty of people like me within it. It's been buried now, but when people came to this country they had politics with them. People that came into the factories in areas like Southall came from the left. They came from nationalist traditions, they came from Communist traditions, every single variety of Marxism was represented in the early *Indian Workers' Associations*.

We clashed with the *Indian Workers' Associations* because they didn't want to recognise domestic violence—they were very socially conservative in terms of family life—but they were politically radical in other ways, so there were things we could relate to.

During the Rushdie Affair we defended Rushdie's right to write as part of our right to critique our own traditions and in defence of our secular traditions—we've come out of radical traditions that we bring with us. People told us that the stand we took would put us outside the

community, but it actually meant more Muslim women came to us, and we didn't lose any Muslim clients.

RS: Do you think religious identity is becoming more fixed?

GS: I think it is. When I was at university in the 70s there were national groups, *Indian Student Associations* and *Pakistani Student Associations* and stuff like that, and we actually were from India and Pakistan rather than British Asians. Now there are many more British Asians at the universities and you'll find many more Muslim groups of different kinds, there will be a *Hindu Students' Federation* which is very active on the campuses—I cannot imagine these existing in the '70s or even early '80s.

RS: One of the things New Labour has done is to support the creation of single faith schools. Do you see anything positive in this?

GS: No, I think it's a disaster. Again there is the influence of Christianity within the state system, the existence of voluntary controlled Christian schools who can pick and choose who they take in has been one of the fundamental problems. I think one of the reports on Bradford [*following the 'race' riots in the north of England in the Summer of 2001*] pointed this out—that segregation has occurred because the Christian schools have attracted white kids and Afro-Caribbean kids to them and left the local state schools being totally Asian. So it leads to a sort of racial divide within the school system.

Single faith schools are however also partly a response to very active Islamic, Hindu and Sikh organisations that are arguing for these schools to be set up. There's an argument that you can create a more positive identity from within those schools, but I don't buy it. I think the kind of identity developed in, for example, a Muslim school cuts out the lived Islam of the Subcontinent which is actually a very diverse Islam.

RS: There have been a number of issues concerning religion and race relations since New Labour came to power—Blair's discourse on Christianity, the treatment of asylum seekers, the 'race riots' over the Summer of 2001—do you think those things are connected in any way?

GS: I think that Blair has moved the argument from race to religion, so Blair looks at religious minorities rather than racial minorities. I think that movement has come about partly because the minorities are asserting themselves in a religious voice. But that ties in with Blair's own thinking.

I think that the general Christian ethic which is being asserted, and the promotion of faith schools along side that, is a disaster. At the same time that the Government talks of adopting British norms and so on, they're actually dividing Britain up more and more into different religious groupings. I think it is hard for those of us who are atheists and who want to live in a genuinely multicultural society with interracial mixing, to find a space within that.

RS: There's a seeming contradiction between the assertion of 'Britishness' on the one hand and the way the economy is now dominated by multinational companies on the other. Do you think that as the economy becomes more global people feel

the need to draw a sense of national identity closer?

GS: I think in England there really has been a loss, with the founding of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. People don't really know what to be English means anymore. There have been a lot of blind alleys that certain kinds of rather sterile, state forms of anti-racism have taken. The people who originally opposed racism were not merely anti-racists but had a vision of something else.

Mistakes have been made in failing to look at white exclusion. This is a Government—for all its talk—that is not interested in the white working class, or the people who are not working class anymore as they've lost their jobs and don't have a place in the world. And I don't think it cares about Asian socially excluded people either, other than rapping them over the knuckles. It worries about them because it doesn't want riots and [*so*] it will put resources into them. But the forms through which they try and mobilise around these groups—through community leaders who are already discredited and through religious leadership—are not necessarily effective.

The offset of this is that there is going to be a resurgence in forms of racial and religious identity.

RS: You've talked about left-wing traditions in both the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities. Do you think there is a possibility of the reformation of these communities around political issues?

GS: I hope there is. We see signs, there was some attempt at having a *Civil Rights Movement* that came out of the struggles of families for justice over issues of policing and deaths in police custody.

But I think that if we don't take on board some of the difficult things within our own societies—and one of the key issues is the religious revival and the growth of fundamentalist movements—then we really won't be able to formulate a new movement.

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Cultural Bulimia

John Beagles & Dave Beech

Famously, Raymond Williams argued that *culture* is one of the most complicated words in the English language.¹ It would be reasonable to assume that its complications are accretions, i.e. that an original and simple word, meaning, say, to grow, has been stretched, morphed and twisted around to the loss of any core reference it once possessed. Anyone harbouring suspicion of the academic world could no doubt explain this by wagging a finger at meddling academics prone to too much intellectual monkey business.

Yet they would be wrong as, according to Williams, from the beginning the word had a range of meanings. *Colonies, cults* and *cultivation* were there at the outset, like a chain linking habitation, worship and natural growth. To paraphrase Williams, culture may be ordinary but it has also always existed in a state of flux. What gives contemporary complications of the word *culture* their special quality is that they are flavoured with all sorts of contestation, rivalry, dispute and fissure, which have effects and consequences beyond the confines of academia.

It is one thing for a word to have a number of meanings, to be prone to semantic slippages, but it is quite another for those meanings to be incompatible. Here a common set of beliefs gels protagonists together in such a way that arguments are primarily disagreements over the interpretation of accepted rules, etc. However with the word *culture*, and its possible meanings and interpretations, we are confronted with the wedge which splits and tears this neat and tidy social space. Here, there is no shared set of ground rules. The divisions which spill out from culture flow along frequently disparate, isolated paths. We would undoubtedly be able to come to an agreement over semantic differences of a word, but the argument resulting from setting Beethoven against Tammy Wynette in the cultural stakes would present infinitely more insurmountable problems. Today, the complications embedded in the word *culture* point to incommensurable interpretations. Ultimately they speak of cultural and social divisions.

The root of much of the division has been the effect and influence of what has become known as *popular culture*. Whether it be art, opera, classical music, literature or ballet, the spectre of this ‘other’ form of culture (whose name has shifted from kitsch to mass- to popular-) has shadowed the paths of these more traditional, accepted examples of culture (what we might once-upon-a-time have referred to as *Culture with a Capital C*). Existing in a peculiar parental relationship, popular culture was in its earlier more lumpen incarnations often tarred as the bastard, vampiric child of Culture with a Capital C. Contemporary forms of communication such as film and television have frequently been abused for feeding on and sucking the life from these noble inhabitants of Culture’s lofty palaces. While today such black and white, slap dash cartooning of the cultural landscape would be unthinkable (for all but the most mule-like conservative), it’s worth remembering that our present more enlightened cultural habitat is a relatively new phenomenon.

While popular culture may be an elusive, shape shifting, mischievous body which academics, artists and intellectuals tussle over, previous theorised incarnations didn’t have the same trouble. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the notion of kitsch had certain, specifiable properties over which there was a broad intellectual consensus. Similarly, the idea of mass culture conformed to a given set of social and economic relations. What unified the intellectual reference to kitsch and mass culture was not just the obligatory disparagement of “the debased and academized simulacra of genuine culture.”² The

formulation of the concepts of kitsch and mass culture also shared the critical, even radical, analysis of the relationship between low cultural value and the overarching presence of management and marketeering. This was best summed up in the term *culture industry*, understood as the primacy of industrial and commercial interests in the production of goods that are barely cultural at all. In this schema, the stench of business ensured that consumers of such products were relegated to the cultural wasteland. The idea of being banished to a cultural wasteland is a potent one; it is what fuelled the dystopian, alienated landscape of cultural conservatives such as T.S. Eliot, and fuelled some of Clement Greenberg’s more extreme pronouncements on art and culture. Entrenched and seemingly intractable, it was this conception of culture which held sway. Such a dystopian view of the corrupting evils of popular culture’s beguiling charms enabled dedicated protectors of all that was noble and right to scaremonger publicly about the contaminating effects of film and television.

The culture which has no name

The term *popular culture* was initially brought in to protect radical or authentic culture (a modern version of folk art) from the same criticisms. Richard Hoggart’s book *The Uses of Literacy*, coupled with his setting up of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* at Birmingham University in 1963, ensured that he is widely seen—as Jim McGuigan has written in his overview of the history and evolution of cultural studies, *Cultural Populism*—as being responsible for a shift in British cultural debate from “a stark opposition between elitist minority culture and lowly mass culture towards a serious engagement

we must face up to the high-tide of cultural studies, a scholastic world in which poor, black kids ‘resist’ & ‘subvert’ power through the ingenuity of their haircuts

with the value and values of majority cultural experience.” If cultural theory schools across Britain have a theoretical godfather it is Hoggart, not Williams.

After the popular culture explosion in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s, the term *popular culture* became more capacious in its use, referring to experiences that had once been thought kitsch and commercial. Hoggart’s rather romantic, genteel conception of popular culture was quickly replaced by the white heat of a far more robust, hungry form of popular culture. A determined group of radicals campaigned against the use of such divisive stereotypes of culture and cultural consumption, turning such terms as *kitsch* and *mass culture* into anachronisms.

If the substitution of the term *popular culture* for its predecessors had done away with conservative and radical anxieties about it, then popular culture would possibly be no more than an anthropological term referring to a heterogeneous field of cultural and economic activity. Instead, it is one of the most contested and misconstrued pieces of jargon of the 20th and 21st Century.

Stuart Hall, one of the pioneers of Cultural theory, remarked that symbolic aggression against mass culture was always, though perhaps cryptically, a version of aggression against the masses. It is worth pursuing the hypothesis that repressed fear and loathing for the working class returns as contempt for mass culture, but the argument has

to go further than that. The term *popular culture* was coined by intellectuals, aesthetes and the educated in order to refer to the culture of others. From the outset it was a projection. If the term *popular culture* refers to anything at all it is not the people or the culture it purports to name but the fantasies and anxieties of those who are doing the naming. This is why it is often said that *popular culture* means nothing, that it picks out no specifiable set of cultural norms or qualities; popular culture is nothing other than the culture which is excluded from legitimate or cultivated culture (and defined from within legitimate culture as its other). This results in a very confused or at best weak sense of popular culture’s own identity.

It gets worse. If popular culture is defined negatively and relationally, then the radical incorporation of popular culture into the university and the gallery creates even more problems. When the academics of cultural studies include popular culture as a legitimate object of intellectual study then the last remaining criterion of its identity is fudged. The same sort of thing happens when artists and curators sidle up to popular culture, permitting its access to galleries and artworks in a radical gesture that erases the divisions which maintain art’s privilege. The effect is that popular culture doesn’t only attain its longed for prestige but loses its distinctive character. If popular culture is excluded culture, then its inclusion turns this empty category into an indeterminable boundary. This is, roughly speaking, what has emerged as the current cultural impasse: the divide between art and popular culture has slackened or disappeared so that either value and criteria has to be found to reinstate cultural division³ or we should no longer think in terms of cultural division. Neither option is satisfactory.

Culture is Ordinary

Williams almost filed for adoption papers on the word *culture*. Nobody since Matthew Arnold has had such an impact on the way the term is used. It was Arnold’s evangelical tub-thumping about the value of Culture—for it to represent “the best that has been thought or known in the world current everywhere”—which, Williams recognised, was the trigger for the now widespread suspicion of all talk about culture.

It would be wrong to say that Williams’ concept of culture was not normative. But, he argued so much against the normative conception of Culture that he produced an ethics of the value of the forms of life which that normative conception of Culture brushes aside. An extended and serious engagement in culture based on the fact of division and difference might have extended the scholarship of the connoisseur to every last hiding place of dignity in the lives of ordinary people, annihilating the toffee-nosed superiority-complex while reinvigorating the intelligent aspirations of culture. Instead, culture became the battleground of ideological sectarianism, postmodernist posturing, identity politics, political correctness and post-colonial, -feminist, -Marxist studies.

Williams may still prove to have the requisite subtlety to outdo most of our misgivings about the holistic approach to cultural analysis and social transformation. It is Richard Hoggart’s legacy, however—his establishment of cultural studies as an academic exercise—which takes the limelight today. It is not through lack of respect that we hesitate to call it an academic discipline; cultural studies is internally resistant to having strict demarcations placed on its interdisciplinary activities. Initially, cultural studies had to be of a politically radical hue before it could maintain that all form of culture is worthy of analysis irrespective of their relative prestige. The position implies a

full-frontal attack on the realm of aesthetics which dominated cultural discourse and effectively ruled out any potential alternative by passing itself off as the very soul of humanity, all else being unworthy of the term *culture*. So how did cultural studies turn into the wretched display of subject positions without recourse to judgement, value and ethics? Before we can answer that we must finally face up to the high-tide of cultural studies, a scholastic world in which poor, black kids in inner city Britain ‘resist’ and ‘subvert’ power through the ingenuity of their haircuts.

We don’t doubt the radical credentials of the initial intentions of cultural studies, and the impact the work has had. It would be interesting, however, to compare it with the history and development of ultraviolence in Hollywood. At first it was something of a scandal for Hollywood to depict the lives of the lumpen proletariat in a graphic and realist style, but at each step when the brutality gave way to charm or flavour the criminality and frankness had to be stepped up. It was almost enough in itself that Hoggart wrote seriously and sympathetically about the working class, but Dick Hebdige, writing in the ‘70s, was only interested in subcultural, prickly, indigestible elements of the working class. The idea that heroes had to be good and wholesome was shot to pieces. What couldn’t be sustained, though, was the tendency in cultural studies to make political claims on behalf of the yobs, mods or rastas and later the fans of boybands and romance novels. We don’t mean that the politics of resisting the authority of school teachers or of indulging in mainstream culture was inflated, we mean that it didn’t exist. It exists as a politics only insofar as the study of them interferes with academic customs and standards. This is a classic case of projection.

The reason there is now an impasse within academic schools of cultural studies is that its radical politics was based to some degree on the challenge to a politically unacceptable, entrenched cultural schema. Within this orthodoxy a routinised aesthetic gradient cast popular culture out of serious discussion. Radicals took this normativity by the scruff of the neck and saw what was valuable in the most detested and debased cultural forms. What’s more, it worked. It turned out that no one behaved in the manner which cultural prejudice had expected. Writers such as John Fiske ‘discovered’ that ordinary people watching TV were active and discriminatory; the surrender to consumerism was done on an individual basis, and with intelligence; scholars discovered that different individuals bought the same newspapers and used them in different ways. Well done, but why did it take so long and why did we have to disabuse ourselves of the prejudices against popular culture before we could assault the myths about art? Now, at long last, you don’t have to be an old-style Marxist to acknowledge that artists are no different from anyone else; art is just as likely to include rubbish as everlasting truth, galleries are part of the tourist industry, and the supposed superiority of art over mass culture has to be tested case by case. Having established these inversions of established wisdom, though, the radicals of cultural studies had achieved the academic levelling of art and popular culture (anything now, it seems, can go into a Ph.D. thesis), but that doesn’t mean that all cultural division has vanished, or indeed that all culture is of equal value.

Cultural studies failed to question the relationship between the scholar and culture, it merely extended the range of the scholar’s objects of analysis. The forms of attention expected of an intellectual were not challenged, even if punks and schoolgirls were magically accorded the qualities and attitudes which were previously the pre-

serve of the educated. No, the reason a new aestheticism emerged in the wake of cultural studies and the social history of art is that the radical politics which furnished the latter with its progressive vision of culture did not equip it for an encounter with recidivist philistines (the slightly bruised cultural conservative who had been saving up arguments about value and quality just in case the momentum of cultural democratisation would slip). It makes no sense, and holds no radical promise, to defend the cultural worth of *Some Mothers Do ‘Ave ‘Em*, *The Bay City Rollers* or *Star Wars*. It’s not that these are irredeemably ‘bad’ examples of culture, or even that it is not possible to enjoy them with a sizeable degree of intellectual, moral or political savvy. But the procedure of attending to popular culture for the purposes of those intellectual, moral or political principles leaves something to be desired. Again, we’re not trying to insist on the irreducible worthlessness of those who love popular culture, quite the opposite, what is frustrating, infuriating, is that their affection for it is being turned into its opposite.

you don’t have to be an old-style Marxist to acknowledge that art is just as likely to include rubbish as everlasting truth

Insofar as intellectuals translate popular pleasures into radical gestures, the things which count in popular culture—the forms of attention and affection which popular culture lives off—the very things which guarantee its popularity, are being sidelined. In other words, cultural elitists regard popular pleasures to be hardly worthy of the title pleasure, and radical commentators fail to attend to this normative ranking of pleasure because they prefer a different vocabulary entirely, to speak of political acts rather than entertaining experiences. Artists have done the same, reclaiming popular culture for artistic forms of attention. A whole genre of art has built itself out of an anthropological relationship between the artist and popular culture. It is what Hal Foster calls the ‘ethnographic turn of contemporary art’:

“In our current state of artistic-theoretical ambivalences and cultural-political impasses, anthropology is the compromise discourse of choice”.⁴

One reason why anthropology seems so desirable to contemporary artists, especially in their relations with popular culture and everyday life, is that it simultaneously holds out a generous hand to the downgraded aspects of social life and guarantees that the artist’s own privileged position will not be infected by the values of the befriended culture. Anthropology offers a model in which the artist can engage in ‘low’ culture with the emphasis squarely on knowledge rather than pleasure, in circumstances where the pleasures of popular culture are hardly considered to merit the term pleasure at all.

Questions about art’s relationship to popular culture are rarely pitched with anything but the most scant ethical attention. When writers are not merely observing the traffic between two worlds, they moan about standards or exclusions—quality or equality. It generally depends on whether the writer thinks that the two worlds ought to remain firmly separated or nicely, kindly, democratically fused. It is as if the elitist is happy to think of cultural rivalry so long as elitist culture is on top, whereas the populist is not happy unless rivalries within culture have been dissolved. Think, for instance, of the Leftist recoil from young British art’s avowed populism or somatic pleasures, its

media fuelled glamour or unmediated mundanity. This art since the late ‘80s, it seems, has broken into a retreat from the critical, intellectual, mature business of taking culture seriously. Or, ‘high art lite’—to use Julian Stallabrass’ slogan—carries ‘a marked lack of seriousness.’

Stallabrass’ argument—that there is an ‘anti-theoretical heart of high art lite’—can be read as a demand to return to established modes of thinking, a rearguard attempt to reinstate an old hierarchy of pleasures and knowledges. But art today cannot rely on such pedigree—not because serious thinking is haughty or corrupting, but because the situation requires us to think differently.

The problem is not just with critics who demand that artists take art seriously. Artists too have often sidled up to popular culture with their enthusiasm dampened by anxiety. Fair enough, perhaps: no artist wants their romance with popular culture to consume their romance with art. The danger, though, as we’ve often seen, is that of being branded unserious and uncritical, to be seen as part of the culture of the spectacle and thus to have fallen through the safety net of art’s autonomy. The anxiety is related to real effects but it is almost always overplayed. It is as if every tentative step toward the popular has to be followed by an over compensatory gesture of resistance to it, a theatrical restatement of art’s need for its ablation of the philistine impulses in entertainment and commerce. Such artists are the bulimics of popular culture, the more they are drawn to it the more forcefully they immunise themselves against it.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, Fontana, p.87
- 2 Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, *Pollock and After*, Francis Frascina (ed), Harper and Row, 1985, p.25
- 3 Conservative, art critics like Hilton Kramer put their considerable weight against the incursions of popular culture into the vaunted confines of art with a number of caveats. The traditions he is defending, the modernist legacy of high-powered cultural vanguardism, happen to be replete with hostilities towards an older form of conservative immobility. When Hilton Kramer hears the word ‘revolver’ he reaches for his culture because he is scared someone is about to play a Beatles album.
- 4 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, MIT press, p183



TOP:
Raymond Williams
ABOVE:
'Portrait of J. Beagles', Jim Ward

Anti-Semitism, Zionism, and the Palestinians



Noam Chomsky

It's useful to mention a moral principle that's so trivial it's embarrassing—the reason for doing so is it's near universally disregarded. It's easy (and not even gratifying) to criticise and condemn the crimes of others. It's a little harder to look in the mirror and ask what we're doing because it's usually not very pretty, and if we're minimally decent we're going to try to do something about it. When we do, depending on where you are in the world the problems can vary. In some countries it can mean prison, brutal torture, or getting your brains blown out. In countries like ours its condemnation, the loss of job opportunities, or something mild by international standards. It's much harder than to just talk about how awful the other guy is. For example, there's a US literary genre developing with many books, articles and passionate discussions about a flaw in our character: 'We don't react properly to the crimes of others', and 'What's the matter with us that prevents us from doing this?' There are obviously much bigger problems—like why do we continue to participate in massive atrocities, repression, terror, but we don't do anything about it? But there's no literary genre on that. All of that shouldn't be necessary to say, but I've said it. Beginning with anti-Semitism. In the US when I was growing up anti-Semitism was a severe problem. In the 1930's depression when my father finally had enough money to buy a second-hand car and could take the family on a trip to the mountains, if we wanted to stop at a motel we had to check it didn't have a sign saying 'Restricted'. 'Restricted' meant no Jews, so not for us; of course no Blacks. Even when I got to Harvard 50 years ago you could cut the anti-Semitism with a knife. There was almost no Jewish faculty. I think the first Jewish maths professor was appointed while I was there in the early '50s. One of the reasons MIT (where I now am) became a great university is because a lot of people who went on to become academic stars couldn't get jobs at Harvard—so they came to the engineering school down the street. Just 30 years ago (1960s) when my wife and I had young children, we decided to move to a Boston suburb (we couldn't afford the rents near Cambridge any longer). We asked a real estate agent about one town we were interested in, he told us: 'Well, you wouldn't be happy there.' Meaning they don't allow Jews. It's not like sending people to concentration and termination camps but that's anti-Semitism. That was almost completely national. By now Jews in the US are the most privileged and influential part of the population. You find occasional instances of anti-Semitism but they are marginal. There's plenty of racism, but it's directed against Blacks, Latinos, Arabs are targets of enormous racism, and those problems are real. Anti-Semitism is no longer a problem, fortunately. It's raised, but it's raised because privileged people want to make sure they have total control, not just 98% control. That's why anti-Semitism is becoming an issue. Not because of the threat of anti-Semitism; they want to make sure there's no critical look at the policies the US (and they themselves) support in the Middle East. With regard to anti-Semitism, the distinguished Israeli statesman Abba Eban pointed out the main task of Israeli propaganda (they would call it exclamation, what's called 'propaganda' when others do it) is to make it clear to the world there's no difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. By anti-Zionism he meant criticisms of the current policies of the State of Israel. So there's no difference between criticism of policies

of the State of Israel and anti-Semitism, because if he can establish 'that' then he can undercut all criticism by invoking the Nazis and that will silence people. We should bear it in mind when there's talk in the US about anti-Semitism.

To turn to what are called the problems of Israel / Palestine, that's a misnomer. It should be called the problems of US-Israel versus Palestine. Britain is also involved in its usual manner—a British Foreign Officer in WW II said that 'from now on Britain is not going to be an independent actor in world affairs, its going to be junior partner to the US.' Essentially correct. (There are less flattering terms used now in the British press, but the picture is about the same.) Britain doesn't play an initiating, active role in the conflict but a passive role essentially supporting the US. The US plays an overwhelming and decisive role. Europe can play an independent role; insofar as it chooses not to act and to use its influence it is essentially supporting what the US does. I'm not going to try to run through the history of the conflict, so let's take the current Intifada and the military aspects which are revealing. A few weeks ago in the Hebrew press there was a report by a well known, respected military correspondent attending a meeting of high Israeli military officials discussing the military tactics in the Intifada. One of the officers asked for information about ordnance: How many bullets got fired? The information came back from the IDF (the Israeli army) that "in the first few days of the Intifada [Sept 30th 2000 and the next few days] the IDF fired a million bullets." There was some surprise, it sounded high, and one officer said kind of bitterly (they don't necessarily like the orders they're given to carry out): 'That means approximately one bullet for every Palestinian child.' Remember what was going on then, some teenagers throwing stones. The same article reported another military source who gave a graphic illustration of how it works. He reported that an official from the Palestinian authority who had a European visitor in the first weeks of the Intifada wanted to illustrate to him how it works, so he had his body guard shoot a single bullet. That was followed by two hours of heavy Israeli gun fire aiming at no particular target in response to a single bullet that was fired. In the first month of the Intifada (according to Israeli sources) the ratio of deaths was about 20 to 1 (75 Palestinians / 4 Israeli soldiers in the Occupied Territories). Another example, in the first days of the Intifada Israel immediately began using what are called in the press 'Israeli helicopters'. They're not Israeli helicopters, they're US helicopters with Israeli pilots that were used to attack civilian complexes, killing and wounding dozens of people. That was sort of reported, it wasn't a secret. That's in response to stone throwing, at most. The US did react to that officially. October 3rd 2000, the Clinton administration made the biggest deal in a decade to send new military helicopters to Israel, along with more parts for Apache Attack helicopters—the most advanced in the arsenal which had been sent in September. It's not that they didn't know what they were using them for, you could read that in the newspapers. They were using them to attack and murder civilians. But they needed more because a million bullets in the first few days isn't enough so we need to send them attack helicopters and missiles. When you hear of the atrocities in Gaza (July 22nd 2002, 14 civilians killed by a helicopter missile attack) that's thanks to the US government, and its allies who didn't

raise a finger. How did the American press respond to this? They did report helicopters attacking civilians, but the deal made by the Clinton administration (the biggest in a decade for military helicopters) went literally without report. To be precise, one opinion column in a small newspaper in Virginia mentioned it. That's it for the 'free' press. It's not that they didn't know about it. It was all over the Israeli press, and there were queries to the Pentagon from European reporters asking what are the conditions on the sale of these helicopters. They were told there are no conditions, we don't second guess Israeli commanders, they use it for what they want—and they knew what they were using it for. Two weeks later Amnesty International had a report condemning this and no mention of that, which continues. The reason is, it is considered the right thing to do for the West. Remember Israel is virtually a US military base, an offshoot of the US military system. The same reporter quoted a General as saying: 'Israel is no longer a state with an army, it's now an army with a state.' If you're talking about the Israeli government you're talking about the military. The top political figures are almost always ex-Generals, chiefs of staff and so on. It's not a small army, according to the IDF and analysts their air, naval, armour forces are larger and more advanced than those of any NATO power outside of the US, and as an offshoot it certainly is. So we have an army with a State, the army's basically a branch of the Pentagon. That's the system and it's considered right for them to use these kinds of tactics—a million bullets in the first few days, US helicopters to murder civilians. So we send them more helicopters and so on, because it's a normal way for things to be, and it goes way back. If you know your history of the British Empire you can find many examples. To cite one, 1932, the distinguished British statesman Lloyd George wrote in his diary: 'We have to reserve the right to bomb niggers.' He was referring to the fact Britain had just succeeded in undermining an international disarmament conference which was attempting to put restrictions on the use of air power to attack civilians. Britain very quickly understood that use of air power to attack civilians was far more cost effective and murderous than using ground forces. In parts of the Empire where they no longer had the power to control by ground forces they turned to air power—in the Arab world, against Kurds, Afghans, Iraqis, others who were not front pages. Air power was turning out to be a very effective way to control and suppress civilian populations, hence Britain naturally wanted to undermine disarmament conventions which would block it. (A precedent its successors as global rulers also follow.) Lloyd George was commenting on the British success in this, praising the Government for undermining the treaty as: 'We have to reserve the right to bomb niggers.' That's a fundamental principle of European civilisation, and basic principles like that have a long life. People usually don't say it publicly, but Lloyd George was correctly articulating their inner thoughts and the reason that lies behind them, and what I just described in the first few days of the Intifada is a perfect example.

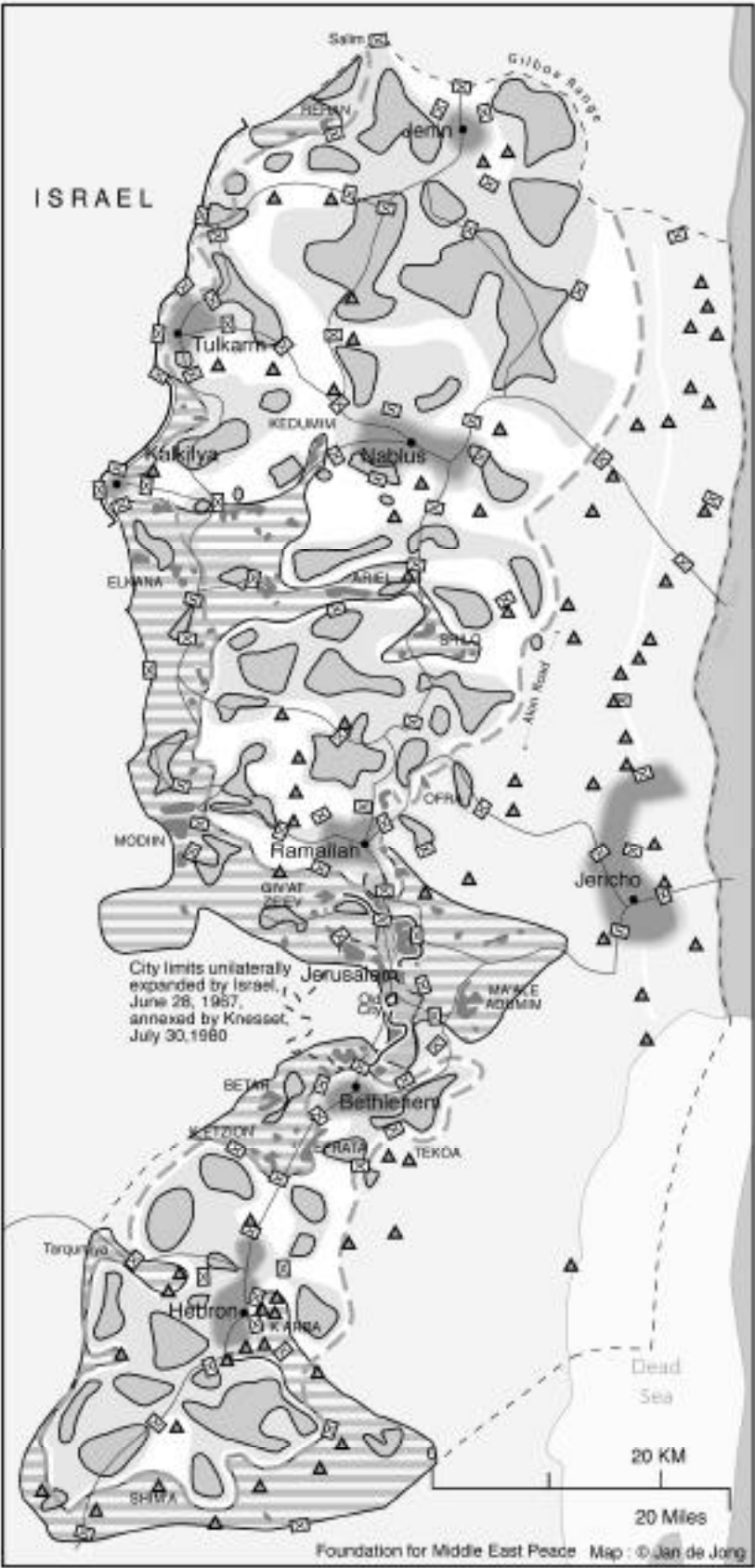
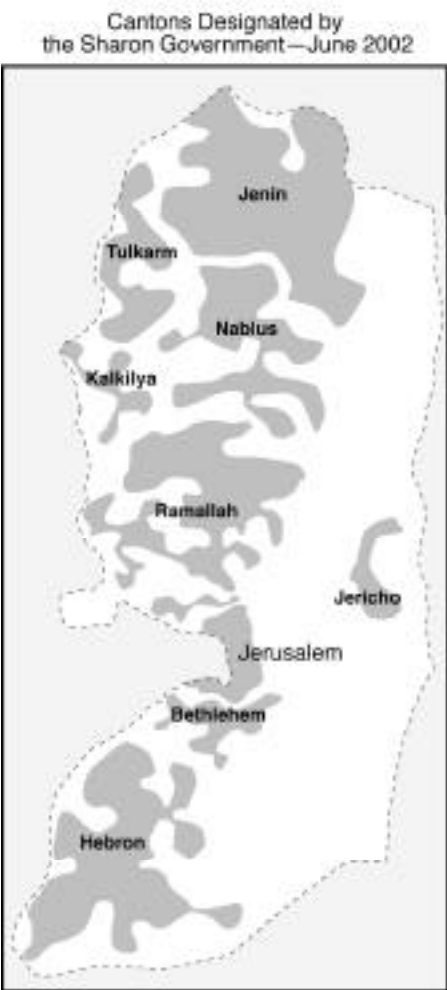
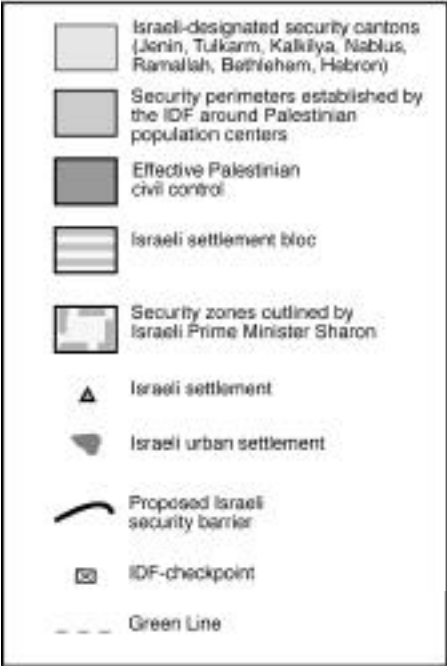
We could go on from there up till today, and trace it back to the earliest days of what has been from the beginning a harsh and brutal occupation. In which for the most part Israel itself was immune from retaliation from within the territories. It carried out oppressive, brutal often murderous policies—mainly the usual imperial

The West Bank After Oslo: Control and Separation— June 2002

techniques: humiliation, degradation, making sure that what are called the ‘Arabushi’ (Hebrew slang for ‘niggers’) don’t raise their heads and if they do they get beaten down, meanwhile taking the land and resources, with the US army. It’s a US-Israeli operation which continues until today. All of that was fine. It’s only when the Arabushi did raise their heads and the niggers started bombing us that it becomes a horrifying atrocity. It is an atrocity, but it’s not the first and it’s not the largest, something we would easily recognise if we were able to rise to the level of looking in the mirror, thinking about ourselves and what we do.

Let me turn to the political. Once the Arabushi are beaten down and they don’t raise their heads any more then you can talk, and you move to the stage called ‘diplomacy’.

There was another recent article in the Hebrew press, this time our main newspaper, the New York Times. The article (by a former high official in the Foreign Office and vice president of Tel Aviv University) was translated into English. In it he was reputing the idea that General / Prime Minister Sharon doesn’t have a strategy. He said Sharon does have a strategy, one which goes way back. In the 1970s and ‘80s high officials in the security establishment were paying close attention to what was going on in South Africa, regarding it as a model that Israel should follow. What was going on in South Africa was an effort to establish ‘bantustans’—independent black run homelands. The South Africa government in the depths of the Apartheid regime was trying to gain international support for the idea that these black-run States were viable independent States: the leadership was black, the police forces were black, the population was mostly black. To gain international support for them South Africa subsidised them, they actually tried to develop industry, keep them viable somehow. Well the world wouldn’t go along, but the Israeli and I’m sure the US establishment was keeping a close eye on them. (South Africa was an ally of the US and Britain throughout this period. As late as 1988 the US government identified Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress as “one of the more notorious terrorist organisations of the world.” The US congress did try and impose sanctions on South Africa, which the Regan administration finally passed after vetoing it but found ways around so that US trade with South Africa actually increased in the late 1980s. Britain was playing similar games with Rhodesia, South Africa.) In 1993 the US and Israel moved to trying to impose a South African style solution—it’s called the Oslo Peace Process. The Oslo Peace Process was described quite accurately by one of the leading Israeli doves, Shlomo Ben-Ami (Foreign Minister under Ehud Barak and chief negotiator at Camp David). He said: “The goal of the Oslo Process is to establish for the Palestinians a neo-colonial dependency which will be permanent.” That is to establish a bantustan in the Occupied Territories. (He was from the dovish end of the spectrum but it’s a pretty narrow spectrum, as in most countries.) Throughout the Oslo process Israel and the US jointly (you can’t do it without US authorisation or support) moved to institute a neo-colonial dependency that would be permanent, bantustans essentially as the model. So US-funded settlement programmes continued right through the Oslo years, peaking in the last Clinton / Barak years. And settlement plans were continued still further, Sharon escalated it—there is a spectrum but it’s the same policy. The settlements are built with an eye for the future—take a look at a map. Take the map presented at Camp David. Camp David was described by the US and much of the West as an amazing, magnanimous, generous offer by Clinton and Barak which the terrible Palestinians turned down and so therefore are responsible for their



own fate. In the US no maps were presented. That’s crucial if you want to determine how magnanimous and generous the offer was. If maps weren’t presented there’s a reason: the maps would tell you exactly how magnanimous and generous an offer it is (and it’s better for the public not to know things like that, particularly when you’re praising the magnanimity and magnificence of our great leaders). Maps were published in Israel. If you look at the maps you’ll discover exactly how generous the Camp David offers were, and what Ben-Ami meant when talking of a ‘permanent neo-colonial dependency.’ They reflect the settlement policies of the Peres and Rabin Governments. Israel takes what’s called Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a vastly expanded area with no resemblance to the pre-1967 Jerusalem which was effectively annexed in violation of Security Council orders. To the East of what’s called Jerusalem there’s an Israeli settlement (which includes a city, Ma’al Adumim) extending virtually to Jericho, which was established to all effect with the purpose of bisecting the West Bank. (A town and settlement means infrastructure, roads, developments on the sides of the roads and so forth). There’s another development in the north going to the settlement of Ariel and beyond which bisects the Northern area. That’s three basic cantons: one Northern around Nablus, another central around Ramallah, another Southern, parts

of Bethlehem. These three cantons are separated from a small part of East Jerusalem which would be under Palestinian administration. (Jerusalem is traditionally the centre of Palestinian cultural, commercial, and other life in fact for the whole region.) That’s the West bank: four cantons, separated from Gaza which is a fifth, and the fate of Gaza was unclear. That’s the generous settlement. You can see why maps aren’t presented. It should be stated however that Clinton / Barak did improve the situation at Camp David, as prior to it the Palestinians in the West Bank were divided into over 200 separated areas. (Some a couple of square kilometers surrounded by barriers and road blocks, mainly for the purpose of humiliation and degradation, they didn’t serve any military function to speak of.) They reduced it from over 227 to only 4. That’s a step forward, a step towards the South African solution, and notice from below because the South African bantustans (whatever you think about them) were reasonably viable by comparison to what was being offered the Palestinians. The settlement programmes also insured the main resources (the best land in the West Bank, the nice suburbs of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem) primarily were and would remain under effective Israeli control with this outcome, and the Palestinians would be able to have a neo-colonial dependency. Under the Oslo agreements the Palestinian Authority which was established

had the same role granted by South Africa to the leadership of the black homelands. Their primary role in South Africa was to ensure the security and safety of the white population, to prevent that notorious terrorist organisation Nelson Mandela and the ANC from harming the people that count. Meanwhile the people that count reserve the ‘right to bomb niggers’—that’s a constant. But the Arabs don’t shoot back, for if they do they become notorious terrorists. And the same is true in the Palestinian bantustan. It was intended that the Palestinian Authority should be brutal, repressive and corrupt. That’s exactly what Israel and the US wanted, that’s why they liked Arafat. What they’re criticising him for is correct, he’s supposed to be brutal, corrupt, repressive and control the population, to sustain the neo-colonial dependency. Prime Minister Rahbin was very frank about it, right after Oslo in the Hebrew press he said ‘look, if we give security control over to the Palestinian Authority they’ll be able to control the population without any concern about the high court, or human rights organisations, or mothers and fathers who may not like what their children are doing’, and so on. And if Arafat robbed European money, or his Authority lived in villas in Gaza while the population is starving, that was fine as long as they did their job—they control the population and ensure that the neo-colonial dependency is established, and make sure the people that count don’t get harmed. They can bomb the niggers but they themselves don’t get harmed. That was the policy of the Clinton administration, and so it continues, until they raise their heads. Then we get one million bullets, helicopters, two hours of firing after a pistol shot, the horror from the West over the fact that the wrong people are being attacked by atrocious actions—and they are undoubtedly atrocious, but the gun fire is the wrong way. That’s essentially it, we can choose to disregard it but technically the facts are pretty straight.

Questions: We recently had a demonstration (estimates of 400,000 people) calling for no war on Iraq and freedom for Palestine. Do you think, to some degree, we are the Achilles heel of the Bush / Blair alliance, and what effect do you think a successful peace movement in Britain would have on the peace movement in the US?

Noam Chomsky: (I’ll have to be brief about each of the questions, unfortunately, as they deserve long answers.)

The American ideological leaders understand exactly what you’re saying and therefore the demonstrations in England were very much played down. The Palestine issue was barely mentioned, if at all. And the reasons are very clear. They know that what you describe is the effect that happens: there’s an interaction. There’s an active peace movement in the US too. Big demonstrations took place last weekend, there’s more planned, and yes that’s the Achilles heel. Popular courses and movements don’t follow orders. Populations (especially in more democratic countries like ours) can influence and effect policies. That’s the reason why there is the suppression of information I described (including the marginalisation of the protests in London), because of the realisation that people who have power—if they choose to organise, act and exercise it—can reverse these processes, both in Palestine and in the case of the war against Iraq.

On the role of the UN, let’s not mislead ourselves, the UN can act exactly as far as the great powers authorise it to act. That means primarily the US-Britain as kind of a reflexive support. What will it allow them to do, what’s the role of the UN? The countries in the UN would like to do more, such as the Non-Aligned Movement. The Arab position representing 80% of the world population is totally different from that of the Western powers. That’s usually true but they’re given very short shrift. So that’s the role of the UN, what we allow it to do.

What’s in it for Blair? The US is the richest,

most powerful country in the world. Britain can be the junior partner, the attack dog when needed, fits very well into British history. Then it gets whatever benefits come from following the big guy. Or it can try to pursue an independent course. That means facing costs, being honest, being a moral force and an effective force, but those are harder traits.

Fox, CNN and the rest, is it outright propaganda? Surely not! There are people in the media who have professional integrity, especially reporters on the scene. As what they do gets filtered up through the institutions, the editorial staffs and the forces that operate on them (corporate and state powers) the picture changes. Things get filtered, shaped, organised, sometimes totally excluded. I gave cases of total exclusion, something pretty hard to achieve even in totalitarian States hence quite remarkable when it happens in a free society, where it’s done voluntarily. The effect is a highly distorted version of the world. It may not be the one reporters see, but it’s the one that works its way through to the system that’s presented.

Public support for attack on Iraq? That’s hard to answer because it depends what the public thinks. The US declared a national emergency in the 1980s because of the great danger to the national security of the US posed by the government of Nicaragua. The President (the brave cowboy in the White House) told us they were only two days march from Texas. The Secretary of State (a moderate in the administration) informed Congress that there is a cancer right here in our land mass, who’s following the plans of *Mein Kampf* and intending to conquer the hemisphere. And if that wasn’t bad enough there was a mad dog, Gadaffi, who was ‘trying to expel America from the world’ as Regan put it, by arming the Nicaraguans so that they could fight us on our home soil. And people were frightened. Now they’re being frightened by Saddam, who’s undoubtedly a monster. He’s nowhere near as dangerous as when daddy Bush, Colin Powell and the rest were coddling him, giving him aid and offering him the means to develop weapons of mass destruction. Just as anyone would! At a time when he was really dangerous, and after his worst atrocities were past—the ones Blair tells you about—Britain and the US continued to support him. You didn’t hear about the gassing of the Kurds then. He’s still a threat to anyone within his reach though the reach fortunately is much smaller, you can tell from the reactions of the countries in the region. But it’s easy to terrify people with the threat Saddam’s going to come and get you. And when people are frightened they tend to support the use of violence. Over time (with educational efforts, organising) that reduces and people’s actual understanding comes out. And it turns out the main concern of Americans (every poll show this) is the economy. The Bush administration is carrying out a major assault against the population here, the way the same people did under Regan—they’re recycled Reganites. The first thing they did under Regan was drive the country into a deep deficit to undercut the possibility of social spending. The Bush administration is doing the same. It worries people, and the last thing the administration wants them to think about (with the 2004 election coming up) is how do you take care of your elderly mother, what’s happening to your pension, why is the environment being destroyed, why don’t I have health care, why don’t I have a job? They want them to huddle in fear because a monster is going to come and get them and therefore they’d better support power, the whole package. So public support looks high but it’s extremely thin and can disappear very quickly.

The Hebrew press is much more open than the English language press, and there’s a very obvious reason: Hebrew is a secret language, you only read it if you’re inside the tribe. Like most cultures it’s a tribal culture. I don’t want to exaggerate, but the English translations on the internet are very

revealing and very interesting.

Influence of Israel over the US elite? In my opinion essentially nothing. They’re very close. People like Richard Perle and others inside the central power group within the US happen to be close to the ultra right wing in Israel. Perle was actually writing position papers for Benjamin Netanyahu (who’s to the hawkish side of Sharon) just a few years ago. So there’s a lot of interaction but Israel can have no influence on the US. If the US doesn’t want them to do something it tells them and they follow orders. We saw that with the pullout from Ramallah a couple of days ago. That same point extends to the power of the Jewish lobby and its backers—technically it’s not a Jewish lobby, it’s a pro-Israel lobby. A substantial part of the lobby happen to be Christian fundamentalists who in the US are a very important force. The US is one of the most Fundamentalist cultures in the world—the proportion of people who believe that the world was created 6,000 years ago, there are miracles and so on, is astounding. It’s a fundamentalist society. It’s not institutionalised, so it’s not like Iran with institutional fundamentalism, but our culture is highly fundamentalist. The right wing fundamentalist Christian block is very strong and mixed—some are activists in the Solidarity movement, but overwhelmingly it’s jingoistic and supportive of Israel, also there’s plenty of anti-Semitism. That’s not a contradiction. If you read the Book of Revelations (which they take seriously) you’ll see why. So you can be both an anti-Semitic Christian fundamentalist and a strong supporter of Israeli oppression and atrocities. It’s not a contradiction and it’s a real political force. So there is an Israel lobby and it has influence insofar as it is allied to actual US power. Where it runs into any conflict with US power it dissolves. (Another factor is they have enormous influence over the media because they happen to be strong within the intellectual community.) So yes, they’re powerful, but I wouldn’t exaggerate their power.

A lot of what’s going on now is aimed at keeping Bush in power. Take the war on Iraq: their timing is critical—the war on Iraq has to take place over the winter, you can’t fight in the desert through mid-summer, so it’s got to be around February. It can’t take place in 2004 as you’re in the middle of a presidential campaign. At the time of the presidential campaign they want to make sure they have a hero running for power who has a great victory behind him and maybe the population won’t pay attention to what’s being done to them, they’ll be praising the hero. So the war has to be over by then and there has to be a victory, so it has to be right now. So the tax cut which is already harming the economy, and will be devastating, that’s timed to come in after the 2004 election. There is careful planning, but will it work?

Is it a war for oil? Anything in that region of the world has something to do with oil, that’s not even questionable. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, whoever controls it will be an extremely powerful force in world affairs—apart from the fact there are huge profits to be made. And it’s always been clear that sooner or later the US will move to take control over this. But that’s been true for a long time. I don’t think that’s to do with the timing, it’s in the background.

This is an edited transcript of a live video link-up from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to public meetings called by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and other groups & organisations, throughout Scotland and the north of England, on Friday 11 October 2002.

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Communities in Resistance

Michael Cropley

Over 1,000 villages and small towns in Chiapas, Mexico have declared themselves communities in resistance. Organised together into 38 Autonomous Municipalities in eastern Chiapas, the Zapatista indigenous people are building a new world. Visiting these communities is an inspiring experience. Local people have taken control of the land, schools and health care, and run things through a system of grass-roots democracy. In many communities state officials and private businesses are unable to set foot.

The Beginnings

The communities in resistance are the fruit of many years of grass-roots organising. This struggle burst into the global headlines on New Years Day 1994 when thousands of armed indigenous people took over the city of San Cristobal de las Casas and the towns of Ocosingo, Altamirano, Las Margaritas and Chanal in Chiapas.

The Zapatistas soon withdrew from the towns but in the indigenous countryside the communities in resistance were busy being born. Many estate owners fled and others were forced to give up most of their land, keeping only that which they could work themselves. Local people took over the abandoned land—800 estates, totalling 80,000 hectares, according to a Landowners Association. Some communities in resistance were formed by ejidos, an officially recognised communal land owning system, deciding to go a big step further and openly declare their total rejection of the government and its system.

Land and Liberty

The communal control of the land is at the heart of the economy in the Zapatista communities. They are totally opposed to the government attempts to introduce privatisation of land through new laws and government agricultural aid and projects. The economy is essentially subsistence agriculture, maize and beans being staples, with coffee also grown for sale. Cattle are raised in some areas.

“Our main production project is coffee. We pick the coffee beans together and put them in great big baskets...Then we clean the beans well and put them out to dry in the sun...We do all this together, and when we sell the coffee the money is for all of us...” :A women’s collective in Morelia.

Some land In the Zapatista villages is worked communally, and some is worked by families. A new development is the promotion of communal vegetable plots, worked by both men and women, and growing a variety of vegetables for local consumption, thus aiming to improve nutrition and health. There are plans to widen the food available by interchanging products between different Zapatista areas.

The Zapatistas are determined to resist the introduction of genetically modified crops, which threaten the maize seeds indigenous people have developed over centuries. The Mother Seeds in Resistance project based at the Oventik autonomous secondary school is collecting, storing and safeguarding such seeds.

All the shops I saw were co-operatives. I visited a co-op shoe and boot making workshop, a “women in resistance” craft shop and wee co-op village shops where the community members take turns to staff the shop.

While people have to work really hard you get the feeling from seeing people sing and laugh while they work that it’s a big change from the days of the harsh finca bosses.



Complete Control

“Our goal is to govern ourselves—to be independent and autonomous of the state and federal government. We make our decisions communally and we carry them out. All decisions here are made at the General Assembly. Every man and woman over the age of 16 votes in the Assembly, and all of us make decisions together.” Zapatista villagers from Morelia describing how in the communities in resistance decision making power lies with the people.

The local village meetings also choose “responsables” to carry out particular duties, and to represent that community’s view in the Autonomous Municipality. Autonomous Municipalities bring together 30 - 40 villages in the same area. Each Autonomous Municipality has a Council chosen to carry out the day to day administration. This council takes its instructions from the Assembly of the Autonomous Municipality, with representatives from each community.

Important decisions affecting a whole Autonomous Municipality are taken by a “consulta”. First an assembly in each community discusses the issue, and then sends its rep, mandated to express the view of that community, to the assembly of the Autonomous Municipality. This assembly discusses the issue, but cannot reach a decision there and then. What it does is try to come to a provisional proposal. This proposal is then put to another assembly in each community, for the communities to vote yeah or nay. The final decision is arrived at by a majority vote of all the communities.

This system based on control by the grass-roots is expressed by the Zapatista slogan mandar obedeciendo—to govern by obeying. Commandante Tacho explains the nature of The Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (CCRI):

“All us commandantes were democratically chosen in the community assemblies or by the local ‘responsables’

communal control of the land is at the heart of the economy in the Zapatista communities...

Zapatistas are determined to resist the introduction of gm crops which threaten the maize seeds developed over centuries

who choose the regional ‘responsables’. The assemblies choose the delegates of the CCRI because the comrades at the grass-roots have to know who they are choosing, and if these people conduct themselves badly the grass-roots will remove them. Because here we are not talking about the work of an organisation but the work of a people.”

Healthy Autonomy

Before 1994 health in the indigenous communities was very poor, with widespread ill health and preventable diseases. After the insurrection, people in the communities came together to start a network of health centres and health promoters. This process is based on what the communities themselves feel they need. Health promoters from different villages come together to discuss their local health needs. What illnesses are affecting people? What kind of health courses are needed? Later, follow up meetings check how work is progressing.

The communities believe that preventing illness is much better than having to take drugs when you’re already ill. Thus health education has led to basic but vital changes, e.g. boiling drinking water, improving food preparation hygiene, the construction of well situated latrines and safe disposal of rubbish.

I visited two autonomous hospitals, both built by Zapatistas from far and near donating their labour. Vital facilities like the kitchen are staffed on a rota basis by unpaid volunteers from different Zapatista villages, some walking long distances to carry out their work. These hospitals run courses for health promoters. The health promoters then return to their villages and work to develop good health there, often running a small health house with basic medical supplies. Health promoter courses include herbal medicine, pharmacy and dentistry. Despite no government funding and the frequent lack of a reliable electricity and water supply, the autonomous hospitals are striving to expand their services. An autonomous hospital I visited provided a dental service, consultations with a qualified doctor, a pharmacy, a laboratory which undertakes analysis of specimens, and a wide range of herbal medicines and preparations.

Herbal medicine is being strongly developed. I attended a graduation ceremony for 13 health promoters who had just completed a course in herbal medicine. At the ceremony each student gave a short speech, telling how they would return to their villages to practise and share their knowledge with their neighbours. This hospital featured a recently built “herboleria” where medicinal plants grown in the hospital’s herb garden were processed. In many respects the promotion of herbal medicine is a rebirth of traditional indige-



nous knowledge.

In contrast to the rigid hierarchy of conventional hospitals, the autonomous hospitals have an ethos of sharing and discussion. For example qualified personnel like Doctors share in tasks like cleaning. Those involved recognise that a huge amount remains to be done. Poverty and a lack of basic services like good drinking water undermine good health. The autonomous hospitals still largely lack facilities to deal with operations and severe illnesses and injuries. But after only 8 years the foundations of community-based health care have been created.

Autonomous Education

Many Zapatista communities have expelled the government teachers and formed their own autonomous schools. The communities choose local people, often teenagers, to be “education promoters”, to learn to teach in the autonomous schools. Where possible promoters take a six month course in one of the two autonomous education centres.

Most autonomous schools are primaries but there are also autonomous secondary schools, e.g. at Oventik where a young education promoter enthusiastically showed me the computer room, library, and new classrooms under construction. The idea is for promoters to develop a different vision of education of their own making, also reflected in the development of new teaching materials. The children are encouraged to learn and are not punished. Girls and women participate fully. Education is non-competitive.

In addition to history, language, maths and the environment, etc. the children learn how to organise themselves, how they can resist an exploitative system, about the rights of children, about the rights of women. Indigenous culture and language is fostered. Children learn about natural medicine, herbs and plants, and about the need to preserve and protect nature.

In a Zapatista village I visited, the sounds of singing and music were often heard from the school. One day I saw the children and the teenage education promoter roving the village on a treasure hunt, an exercise which led to the children drawing beautifully coloured maps of the village. Plays were performed before the whole community at fiestas. I had not anticipated that my journey to rebel Chiapas would include playing one of the 3 Wise Men in the school Nativity play! When you see girl pupils excitedly hug their dedicated woman teacher, you understand that this is far from the authoritarian education system we are familiar with. Each school has autonomy, the decisions to do with the running of the school being made locally.

Autonomous education is for the adults too. In New Guadalupe Tepeyac in the Lacandona jungle 60 women attended literacy classes 3 times per week, and women participated in a textile workshop for an hour each day, providing a communal break from domestic work.

Different adults sometimes also contribute to



the learning process, coming into school to speak about a particular topic. “The classroom is a space where the community can share its ideas, everyone sharing their ideas and in this way being equal.” The Zapatista communities have decided that it is not acceptable for adults to hit children, and this is banned.

In the small community I spent time in, the children and youths worked as well as going to school, carrying firewood and rubbish, picking fruit, etc. I gained the impression they were much more integrated into the community than in the UK.

Women Organise

“We work collectively. When the organising started everybody, men and women, started to organise. Women left their homes to go to meetings. They didn’t do their work at home any more. There was no time for that. In the past we never worked collectively like we do now. Men used to tell women that they had no rights. Now we know that we all have rights. Young people work together—men and women together. Our lives are better now. We are happier now because we all have the right to get out of the house, to work in the projects and to participate in the life of our town.” Women and men from the Zapatista community of Morelia.

Women from Morelia speak : “We have a Women’s General Commission. We meet once a month, here or in other towns. These meetings are only for women. When all the representatives from all the communities come, there are about 150 of us. We had a meeting to draft the rules of the Women’s commission. We also had a meeting to discuss the Revolutionary Women’s Laws... These laws are very important. They are teaching us about our rights as women. We think that our lives as women are better now. We are happier now because we have the right to do what we want and need to do...”

Before the insurrection women didn’t have any say. They were often forced to marry someone they hadn’t chosen, when still very young, e.g. 13 or 14.

“...we never worked collectively like we do now. Men used to tell women that they had no rights. Now we know that we all have rights. Young people work together—men and women together.”

They didn’t go to community meetings. Girls often didn’t go to school, having to stay home and help with the housework. Women didn’t play sports or even dance. Now in the Zapatista communities, women participate in the meetings, girls go to school, girls and women dance and play sports. Women hold positions of responsibility in the communities and Autonomous Municipalities. Women are “health promoters” and “education promoters”. Women’s collectives run shops, organic gardens, bakeries, coffee production, animal raising



and many other projects.

The Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Laws assert that women have the right to freely choose their partner, the right to freedom from violence by strangers or relatives, the right to occupy positions of leadership in civil and military organisations, and other basic rights. The banning of alcohol in the Zapatista communities was, I was told, largely a women’s initiative—women had suffered badly from alcohol-fuelled domestic abuse. It is widely recognised that much still has to be done for women to achieve real equality—but at last things are moving in the right direction.

Basic Services

The poverty and lack of basic services suffered by indigenous communities in Chiapas is difficult to imagine for people in the “First World”. Many communities don’t have electricity, or have an erratic and unreliable supply. It is exceptional for homes—which are generally wooden huts with a dirt floor—to have piped water. Often water is gathered from stand pipes in the village, sometimes it has to be carried some distance from a spring. Generally the water has to be boiled before being drunk. Communities do not have sanitation. Cooking is usually done over open wood fires, leading to women especially suffering illnesses from the smoke.

The Zapatista communities are striving to improve the quality of life by installing basic services, often with national and international solidarity. Projects include supplying drinking water, generating electricity, sometimes by solar power, building enclosed wood stoves, constructing compost toilets, etc.

I worked for a short time on a water project called Kiptik. Together with the local people we were installing a much-needed rain-catchment drinking water system in a small Zapatista community which up till then had no proper water supply at all. Kiptik works along with the Autonomous Municipalities, who decide in which community the project’s resources are most needed. Skills and resources are shared to promote self-sufficiency. Community based water committees provide a means whereby the drinking water systems can be maintained. The Zapatistas refuse to work with NGO’s who try to impose their own priorities.

The Zapatista communities in resistance are among the many communities in Chiapas who are refusing to pay the exorbitant electricity tariffs. Many Zapatista villages sport an electricity supply which has been diverted from a passing electricity line destined for a garrison or government-supporting town.

Communal Culture

The Zapatista communities have a thriving communal culture. I attended fiestas where hundreds of men, women and children arrived from dozens of different Zapatista villages in that region, with the women often in beautifully embroidered traditional dress.

Zine & Comic Reviews

Mark Pawson

Another bumper crop of print creations this time around, and as there's lots of small publications it seems logical to review everything in size order, biggest first, leaving the little ones for last. Next issue I'm planning a whole column of free publications, all contributions and suggestions of publications to include will be gratefully received.

Found notes and letters have an enduring appeal and have often appeared in zines and one-off collections previously, **Found Magazine** is the first regular magazine devoted entirely to them. It's a winning formula, **Found Magazine** fills a big 112 pages with love letters, nasty notes, shopping lists, sketches, school essays, photos, blackmail demands, notes left under windscreens, wipers and even a 'Curtsy' notice from the San Francisco Hell's Angels. Material of this kind speaks for itself and doesn't need any explanation or comments. Excellent as it is, **Found Magazine** is let down by an annoyingly messy layout, (some kind of anti-computer statement?), and far too many plugs for the editor's websites and other projects. Nonetheless, I'm glad **Found Magazine** is around, and with an active readership sending in contributions it should continue for a good while. After receiving a squashed frog found on the 25th floor stairs of a tower block, they politely ask readers not to send any more dead animals.

Extrapool, Nijmegen in the east of Holland is a unique autonomously run centre that houses a print shop and hosts film shows, exhibitions and performances. The print shop operates stencil printers, ancient Roneo and Gestetner duplicators and their modern day descendant, the digital stencil printer. Looking like photocopiers from the outside, digital stencil printers contain cylindrical drums of ink, around which stencils are automatically wrapped. These machines are intended to print in a single colour only, but the *Extrapool* printers have pushed them to the limit and somehow manage to print in full colour which has a unique vibrant look and sophisticated yet raw-edged feel. **Half-Wit** #2 is *Extrapool's* house magazine, a riotous mix of graphics, comics, artwork and photos from 42 of the diverse artists/musicians/performers who have worked/exhibited/performed at the venue. **Half-Wit** is also a type of Dutch bread. There's hardly any comics this time around, so I'd better squeeze in Johnny Ryan's **Angry Youth Comix** which with issue 4 has mutated into 'Hot Headed Cyborg Ass Kicker' in

a pathetic and transparent attempt to attract comic fanboys. Inside it's just as sick-smart and reprehensible as ever, probably even more so with this issue's big name collaboration with Peter Bagge—'Hipler'. Adolph's back on the scene, he's totally awesome and just wants to be loved, with the help of his Hollywood agent, Hitler reinvents himself for 2002, hits the Talk Show circuit, becomes a Teenybopper Idol and lands a co-starring acting role in ET 2, before the pressures of

fame get to him and he reverts back to old habits...It's clear why 'Hipler' is a collaboration, if you're going to produce such a gross-out-fest you'd better have someone to share the blame with. In a perfect world **Angry Youth Comix** would be on every news agent's shelves alongside Matt Groening's (imaginary) Sullen Teen Magazine.

Kevin Lyons' book **Natural Born: the graphic history of Reggae, Ska, Rocksteady and Soul 1960-69**, comes in a 7 inch single sleeve. The book graphically explores and celebrates the early days of Jamaican music, the roots of Reggae, Ska and Rocksteady in this period were complex and interwoven, it would be impossible to have a single

comprehensive diagram illustrating all the influences and cross-fertilisation. Lyons doesn't attempt this, instead he gives us an assortment of carefully hand lettered family trees, of artists, labels, studios, producers, DJs and sound systems, together with collections of record company logos, label artwork and portraits of legendary original rockers—Duke Reid, Sir Coxson and Prince Buster. **Natural Born** had me skanking round the living room to the wonderful Club Ska 67 and

Intensified LPs.

French Silkscreen publishers Le Dernier Cri have gone into hyperdrive, publishing 16 new books in 9 months, I was tempted to devote this column entirely to their books, maybe all the fish soup they eat in Marseille acts as magic potion? Most interesting to comics fans is Charles Burns' **Close Your Eyes**—a book of copied drawings. While he was waiting in the badly lit hallway during his daughter's piano lessons, Burns tried reading and sketching, but with the sound of 'Mary had a little Lamb' coming through the door for the fiftieth time found it hard to concentrate, so he hit on the solution of taking a drawing and copying it in the one hour time slot. His source material is classic horror and romance comics and his peer cartoonists' (Crumb, Clowes, Doucet and Panter) original drawings are shown next to Burns' distinctive smooth incised versions. Each of the original comic book images is given the Charles Burns workover, emerging more sinister and grotesque.

When he's not busy txtng late night radio talk shows, Dave the Chimp finds time to abuse the office photocopier and slap together an issue of **Switch On Your Brain**. It's a good old fashioned wake-up-and-do-something-zine. Contents: Steal From Work, Make your own zine & website, Mess with the Swoosh, Reclaim the streets and walls with skateboards and spraycans, Go Barefoot, Sticker

designs to photocopy, there's even a spray painted cover. Maybe you've heard all this before, but still it's good to be reminded, and there's a whole generation out there who haven't, but might just become tomorrow's culture jammers and meme breeders, creating the next wave of zines & comics. "Why don't you switch off your Television/Playstation/Mobile/DVD/Computer and go and do something more interesting instead?"

Having just spent a whole afternoon painstakingly cleaning up photographs and removing shadows in Photoshop, Andrew Lanyon's **The Shadow Shop** makes me wonder why I bothered. THE SHADOW SHOP is a whimsical, poetic attempt to trace the dimly remembered story of Vera Rowley's Shadow Shop which was open for just three days during an overcast spell sometime in 1938. **The Shadow Shop** sold a full range of shadows from simple paper ones that you had to stand on to bespoke models, made of silk and attached to the ankles with elegant leather straps. **The Shadow Shop** has illustrated diagrams, photographs and tipped-in colour plates of elaborate mechanical contraptions with levers and rollers. One demonstrates a man's shadow sliding upstairs, another shows a person banging their head against a wall, causing their shadow to drop to the ground. My informant tells me that the machines pictured are genuine, the rest of **The Shadow Shop** is for you to decide.

Tom Trusky's **Tortillas: A glow-in-the-dark book of miracles**, takes as its starting point the phenomena familiar to *Fortean Times* readers of religious symbols miraculously appearing in everyday groceries—Jesus' face on a Corn Tortilla or Allah's name in a slice of aubergine. **Tortillas** contains 6 printed 'Tortillas' when they're heated up/exposed to light and then viewed in darkness Trusky's personal icons miraculously appear, including Marilyn, Elvis and the almighty S. **Tortillas** comes with 2 sachets of Taco Sauce glued inside—do you

prefer your mysteriously appearing icons with mild or extra hot sauce? **Tortillas**, also incorporates images of Aztec Gods, reminding us that for the Aztecs corn was the source of all life on earth and that in the Aztec creation myth the first humans were made from corn meal by the Gods who then breathed life into them. You don't quite get the same associations when you buy a packet of 'Wraps' from the supermarket.

For the last 10 years Canadian Designer/Book artist Ian Phillips (a.k.a. Pas De Chance) collected Lost Pet Posters from around the world and compiled them in his zine **Snacks**. **Snacks** came with pet food biscuits and dog registration tags glued to the cover and was continually updated with new posters added as they were sent in by readers. **Lost** is a compendium of the Lost Pet Posters in **Snacks**, an instance of a zine being picked up and 'overgrounded' by a major publisher. **Lost** doesn't suffer from this process and benefits from the larger size and increased page count. Simultaneously sad and hopeful, **Lost** illustrates the large number of pets that go missing or get stolen, shows how much their owners care and the lengths they go to—putting up posters around their neighbourhoods and offering rewards for the return of beloved pets. What part do Lost Pet Poster collectors play in this process, are they reducing the chances of pets being reunited with their owners by removing posters for their own selfish pleasure? Wow, I managed to review **Lost** without mentioning Tracey Emin's Lost Cat Posters...



The Caravan Gallery postcards take the instantly recognisable format of a holiday postcard with 4 different views of a holiday town and the town's name in the centre, and replace the picturesque scenes and local landmarks with equally familiar yet less celebrated scenes of urban life—tanning salons, traffic wardens, portaloos, 'humourously' named businesses, boarded up shops, backs of statues, those massive stuffed animals given as fairground prizes, wonky handwritten signs, wheelie bins and rancid canal towpaths. With simple captions ('Signs of Scotland, Glasgow'; 'A Shoppers Paradise, Around Norwich'; 'Glimpses of Ipswich'; 'Lovely Liverpool') these postcards which could be from any town in the UK need no further explanation. They should be on sale at every souvenir shop and news agents in the towns featured. As soon as I saw them in the *bookartbookshop* I bought all 26 postcards in the series. Unlike Martin Parr's dull, and inaccurately titled 'Boring Postcards' books, The Caravan Gallery's ever-growing series of postcards (there's over 50 now) genuinely celebrate and record the mundane, commonplace aspects of Blair's Britain. Jan Williams and Chris Teasdale have travelled with their digital camera and the Caravan Gallery itself to Liverpool, Ipswich, Norwich, Brighton, Glasgow, and there's plans for The Caravan Gallery to appear in a variety of locations throughout the UK in 2003. Their recent residency at the Liverpool Biennial, produced 2 postcards branching out in new directions—a purely conceptual 'River Mersey' card featuring 4 views of murky grey water and a saucy VPL/Visible Panty Lines postcard, focusing on g-strings visible through thin white summer trousers.

Mail for Funtastic United Nations, is a pocket sized Mail Art Kit put together by veteran mail-artist Vittore Baroni and his conspirator Piermario Ciani. The snazzily designed folder contains 22 postcards, 4 sheets of stamps, 3 booklets and a rubber-stamp. Themed around imaginary countries with their own languages, currencies and postal systems, **Mail 4 f.u.n.** embodies the collaborative spirit of the Postal Art Network—each of the 23 contributors from Italy, Germany, Japan and the USA financed a share of the printing costs and received part of the edition when complete. **Mail 4 f.u.n.** is proof that the mail-art network is still alive even if it has taken a battering from upstart electronic communication methods. **Mail 4 f.u.n.** also serves as an inspiring working model of how an ambitious international project can be realised.

Pocko editions are a series of cute uniform books by artists, photographers and illustrators. They're all 96 pages, postcard sized, budget priced and come in batches of 5 titles, with a neat slip-case thrown in if you buy the set. They've defined their own space which is somewhere between artists' books, news-stand fashion/art glossies and Taschen books, but hey at just £4.99 each it doesn't really matter where they fit into the grand scheme of things. To do a proper review of Pocko books I'd need all 5 books in front of me, but for some strange reason they only sent one. **Pocko's, Out of Science** showcases Hiro Sugiyama's paintings and collages which draw on the vernacular imagery of Mexican and Indian educational posters and children's illustrated 'World of Knowledge'-type encyclopedias—the genre of workman-like proficiently painted illustration art. From this source material Sugiyama creates graphically rich, Jim Shaw-esque curious paintings, which always have a discordant element to them. It's a great image book which can be dipped

into repeatedly, but c'mon **Pocko**, how about titles for the paintings or more information on Sugiyama's publishing company, which apparently distributes a free newspaper in Tokyo on the 23rd of each month, which is payday in Japan?

Getting smaller, and cheaper we come to **Neomu** #4. If you guillotined 3 cm off the top of a **Pocko** book and used the chopped-off bits to make more pages you'd eventually get an 11cm square 160 page book. Then invite 80 designers and illustrators to contribute a monochrome 2 page spread, and print it all in a rainbow of colours graduating from glossy neon pink at the start to a matt dull purple at the end of the book and you've got **Neomu**. You've invited lots of contributors, from Australia and Singapore so it's not a case of work from 'all the usual suspects' (well it might be if you're Australian or Singaporean). **Neomu** is delectable top grade eye candy, hard-to-find and costs £1 / US\$ / HK\$10 / ¥100 / EURO 1 depending on where you live—**Neomu** is cheap in any language.

Yasushi Cho's **More Books About the Transmission and Food** is an instant collection of 4 colourful teeny tiny books packaged in a hanging plastic strip with pockets for each book—like sweets in a Japanese ¥100 shop. Each of the 4 hand sewn books contains intricately collaged and rearranged images from magazines, food packaging and photo booth portraits. **Please Bury Your Finds So Others Can Discover Them** by Matt Pattinson, measures in at just 4cm square. It's a collection of 28 succinct pictograms of modern stereotypes, undersea creatures and interesting sexual positions. Economical and precise almost to the point of abstraction, there's still a couple that I haven't figured out yet, and in true image virus style, if you look carefully these designs can be spotted stickered onto lampposts and screened on t-shirts.

The winner of this issue's prize for the smallest book, measuring a minuscule 1 x 7cm, is Tracey Bush's **The Thames pH Book**. Using readily manufactured books of litmus paper, each page of **The Thames pH Book** has been dipped in water collected from sites along the River Thames. The book takes us on a journey upriver from Purfleet to Kew, accompanying the Environment Agency's weekly River Run, sampling water at 18 locations. Each page of this labour intensive, site specific book has the location and pH value of the water sample rubber-stamped on it. Thrill as pH values soar to a whopping great 7.78 and then dip down to a miserable 7.39. As I flicked through **The Thames pH Book** I found myself secretly hoping for an off the scale reading caused by polluted water; can you imagine the excitement of a pH reading of 9.13?



Contacts

FOUND MAGAZINE. 3455 Charing Cross Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48108-1911, U.S.A. Available in Tower Records if you're lucky enough TO find a branch that's still open...
www.foundmagazine.com

HALF-WIT, available from Disinfotainment.

ANGRY YOUTH COMIX Fantagraphics Books, available from all good comic shops

NATURAL BORN, available from Artomatic, 13-14 Great Sutton St., London, EC1V 0BX
www.artomatic.co.uk

CLOSE YOUR EYES, available from Disinfotainment
www.lederniercri.org

SWITCH ON YOUR BRAIN, 171 Corfield Street, London, E2 0DN
react@switchonyourbrain.co.uk

THE SHADOW SHOP, available from bookart-bookshop

TORTILLAS: *A glow-in-the-dark book of miracles*, Tom Trusky, Painted Smiles Press, P.O.Box 6414, Boise, ID 83707, USA

LOST, Chronicle books.
The Caravan Gallery, 77B Lucknow Street, Portsmouth, PO1 1PT
Postcards available from; Zwemmers/CCA, Glasgow; The Lighthouse, Glasgow; Fruitmarket, Edinburgh; Beyond Words, Edinburgh; bookart-bookshop, London.
www.thecaravangallery.co.uk

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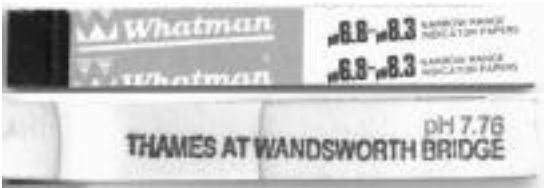
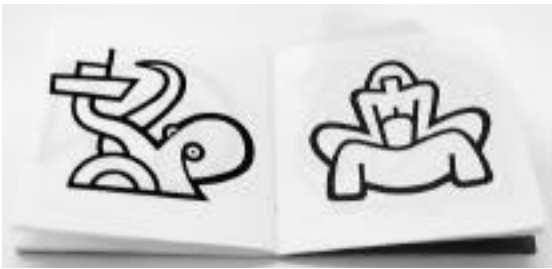
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THE THAMES pH BOOK, available from *bookart - bookshop*, 17 Pitfield Street, London, N1 6HB
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Ian Brotherhood

Lost in France

It was the first day there. First time in France.

The bus contracted by the employment agency had taken us to the digs after a rough ferry-crossing from Hull, and we were all still moaning about the shared rooms, the evidence of cockroaches and the lack of fridges, tellies or sound systems.

It might've helped if I'd known anyone, but we all seemed to be solo, stuck in our own sullen worry — the agency had said there would be three weeks at least, cropping turnip and beet. It was said to be hard graft, but decent cash if the targets were met, and the man said I looked strong and fit, I would do.

Sitting in the kitchen section of the portakabin which doubled as a lounge/recreation area for the twelve of us, it was inevitable that some argument would erupt — the pecking order hadn't been established, and several of the younger lads were sussing one another, trying to establish who would win out in any permutation of confrontations. It was still early on the Sunday, and we'd all been on the go for nearly thirty-five hours. Sleep had been sporadic and unsatisfying.

Jim, the oldest of us, had cracked his litre of whisky and was happy to share it for three Euros per head contribution to the next purchase. I passed. We were all struggling to convert the currency into Sterling, never mind Francs, but we knew he knew he was making a killing until we found the local stores and could buy for ourselves. The others had long since exhausted their cargoes on the bus-trip from Paris, and the more desperate were happy to part with the unfamiliar notes, staying seated and as close to the bottle as possible, watching as Jim poured the measures and paced himself carefully, making them wait.

It was Johnson who started it. He was on about some scrap he'd been involved in after an Old firm game, how he'd been cornered by a group of Rangers fans but managed to fight them off. Gerry laughed and downed the rest of his whisky, shaking his head and saying how full of shit the younger lad was, how unlikely it was that Johnson could fight off a drunk teletubby never mind a half-dozen stocious teddy-bears.

Johnson moved fast, the chair scraping across the linoleum as he rose to his feet and brought the glass down on the table's edge, making a noise but not cracking it. Gerry was slower off the mark, but soon had Johnson against the door, one hand at his throat, the other holding the glass-bearing hand hard against the wall.

You'll be going home sooner than you thought, Gerry said, and Jim had already moved across to intervene. I got up and as soon as Gerry had backed off enough for the door to be opened, I went outside.

It was warm, much warmer than the Scotland we had left the night before last. The clocks had only shifted forward one hour after the trip, but it felt as if time had been changed in some other way, that the sun was not where it should be, was somehow altering its behaviour. We had left Glasgow with sleet battering against the bus, the driver having to use the wipers at double-speed to clear it as we headed South, and he cursed every now and then as the wind buffeted the vehicle.

Now, the sky was bright and blue and there was no wind. We would be starting next morning, five a.m., but no way I was staying in that madhouse another second. There would be further fights, more tall tales and jeering, more Old Firm shite. Just the same as at home.

The portakabins were sited at the top end of a long, sloping earthy plot marked out with an ancient barbed-wire fence which ended at the riverbank. The river must have recently flooded, and all manner of plastic bags and bottles and sundry shit marked how high the water had risen. There was no wind, but a sour, milky smell, maybe

coming from the water.

Although the units looked fairly new and were clean and bright in the sun, they were atrocious inside — the smell of the previous occupants was still there, but the atmosphere itself was worse than the stale air, as if the accumulated grievances and hangovers of all those other temporary workers had somehow been absorbed, trapped by the walls and bedding. Four of us in the one room, one wash-hand basin, four tiny bedside cabinets and no lockers. I'd already shoved my bag under the bed, and it didn't take long to dig out my trainers. Abid, who had gone to school at the same time as my younger brother, was sound asleep on top of his bed, still had his boots on. He was muttering in his sleep, occasionally snorting, as if something was blocking his nose. He seemed alright. Maybe he would be a friend for the next month. If not, no danger. I was happy to keep myself to myself.

But right now, a walk. Anywhere. Clear the head, maybe see some birds or even a boar — we were close to the edge of the Fontainebleu forest, and it said in the brochures the agency gave us that the wild pigs were still hunted for sport by the wealthier locals.

I knew the town of Grez was small, but it was still a surprise to be clear of it so suddenly. I guess maybe I was walking North, but that's no matter. I didn't know. If it wasn't North it felt like it should be. Just good to get out for a while, and no-one to bother me, no bullshit stories to listen to. Just walking in a place I didn't know, where no-one knew me, where, if I walked long enough, I would find something, see something new.

The road-signs were few and far-between, but there was a MacDonalds either 3 minutes or 3 miles further on down the road, and an Intermarche another three miles or minutes further again. This name was the one the agency kept repeating in their bump, because it was the closest supermarket where we could buy necessities. I couldn't remember if the place was open on Sundays, but figured that there would be no harm walking there anyway — at least if I found it I would know how to get there on foot and get a rough idea of how long the walk took. I didn't have a watch, but guessed that I'd left the site at 3.30 or so.

Minutes or miles? I knew the French used kilometers, so guessed that the m must stand for minutes. Maybe it wasn't a motorway, but the traffic was going fast enough anyway, and the signs were saying 70, 50, so I guess it was a dual carriageway. I made sure to walk against the oncoming traffic, but there was no footpath as such, and it was just as well it was a dry day — the turf was soft and Spring grass made it comfortable enough, but it was easy to imagine that a half-decent downpour would muddy it quickly. Minutes or miles? If minutes, then I would have to work out how far these cars could cover in three minutes. And that would just be to the MacDonalds. If the Intermarche was another three minutes, that meant at least six minutes. If the cars were going average 60, and that was kilometres, then they would be doing a kilometer a minute. 6 km? Maybe that was about four miles. Four miles.

Remembering Glasgow, I could see four miles as the distance I used to walk between the flat in Maryhill and the folks' old house in Govanhill. That was a decent stretch, but it used to take just over an hour. So maybe that was about 6km, four miles. Whatever, it didn't matter. I was out, and if I didn't reach the Intermarche, no problem. The agency had arranged that we would all be brought there by bus after completing the first day's shift. Still, it would be nice to get some tobacco and maybe even a half-bottle, just to show the others that while they'd stayed inside on such a beautiful day, bickering like wives about Old Firm shite and

paying old Jim a small fortune for niggardly nips of red-eye, I'd shown initiative enough to get off my arse. Not that they'd likely even notice — the younger ones would probably be happy to throw away more of their cash on booze. I started to work out how much I could make if I did what Jim had done, bought a litre and then divvied it out for a fixed price. It was fun doing it in Sterling, trying to imagine how much Jim really was making, but because I still didn't know the price of Scotch in the French places I couldn't entertain the project for long. Still, it was a thought that killed a half-mile or so.

Reached another rise, broached the hill — the stretch ahead was poker-straight and looked awful long, but it was still bright enough, still warm. I stopped, took the light jacket off, slung it over my shoulder and kept going.

Maybe an hour passed, and the same stretch was still as straight, but at least now there was a distant blinking of red and green, and it had to be an intersection with traffic lights. At least there would be a chance to change direction, get away from the road. I was aware of dryness in my throat and a vague feeling of hunger. Maybe time to turn about? I had to have been walking for two hours, maybe a bit more. Still, if I even got to the MacDonalds there would be a phone, taxi-numbers, maybe even a bus timetable. There would surely be a way to get back, and the idea of a nice big burger was now tempting, although I don't usually like that type of thing

The trees were getting closer to the road, and here and there I would have to stop, judging the speed of oncoming traffic before juking out to pass a branch or cluster of budding twigs. Now and then a car would flash its lights at me, but whether the driver was being friendly or expressing anger I don't know. Perhaps they just weren't used to seeing anyone walking along this road. It struck me that since leaving the site I hadn't seen anyone. Not one other person. That's if you didn't count all the folk in their cars and people-carriers and the trucks and buses as well. No-one out in the open like me, no-one enjoying the sunshine and the warm air. Not alongside this road anyway.

The traffic lights were clearer now, but still a long way to go. The road broadened and there was a slip-road coming on from the left, so, what with the drivers all being on the other side from at home, it was a bit confusing trying to get across, trying to time it so that the cars coming around the bend wouldn't be too close. A couple of times I started, then retreated. They were fast, and one car blared a horn, maybe he got as much of a fright as me. Then I got across and there was an overhead road held up by huge round concrete pillars. The lower reaches of these pillars were plastered with layers of posters, big brightly coloured images of Monsieur Le Pen with two raised fists, his expression gleeful, determined and excited, as if he'd just found out he had the winning Lotto ticket. I didn't know what the words meant, but there was a contact telephone number if you wanted to help him. The other posters were even bigger — there was one for the circus coming to a local town, and there was a lion roaring at a smiling woman as a man with a whip looked on. The other poster was the biggest and brightest of all, and there were maybe twelve of them lined perfectly along the arching wall behind the pillars. It was of a dark-skinned woman crouching, and she was wearing scarlet high-heels and had her hands covering her crotch. Her hair was dark and wooly about her face and her lips were painted the same colour as the shoes. She seemed to be blowing a kiss, or maybe just pouting, and there was no script or description of who she was or what she was up to, just a series of fluorescent yellow numbers with a double exclamation mark at the end.

The vehicles crossing the road above made a fast hard rattling sound, like a deep drum, and with the other cars passing below the bridge, the sound was suddenly painful and I was glad to get through it and back onto the grass verge.

The trees seemed taller and closer still, and now a wall, maybe ten feet tall and almost entirely covered with ivy, stretched as far as I could see before it merged with the overhanging branches. It was easier to walk now, a bit more space with all the trees being behind this great wall, and soon the wall curved gently inwards as the entrance to the estate came into view. The gate was iron, ancient, and massive, a good five feet higher again than the wall. Harmillon it said, Harm and illon in great curving letters of iron, painted black and set within the intricate upper frame. The road beyond the gate curved gently towards the front of a chateau, every shutter closed, the three floors supporting turrets which each had another two floors with solitary round windows. The road was strewn with fallen branches and old litter, and you could tell by just glancing at the chain about the gate's middle that it hadn't been used, not by drivers at any rate, for ages. And again, no sign of life at all. No cars in front of the huge building, no lights anywhere, in or outside, nothing. Maybe it was a holiday house for some Parisian playboy and he only used it in the Summer, else maybe there had been a family dispute over ownership and it was going to seed.

The wall curved out again and carried on. The lights were getting closer, and there was the big M for MacDonalds on the other side of the road past the intersection. The traffic was getting thicker too because of the lights, and as I caught up with the queue I could feel the passengers and drivers stealing a quick glance at me, perhaps wondering how I had got there, where I had come from. But surely they wouldn't bother. They didn't know I wasn't local. Not like everyone in the whole place could possibly know everyone else.

A set of hazards flashing as the road curved away to the left, then a man heading for the boot, a woman close behind him. She looked up and saw me, maybe fifty yards away from them, but she kept her arms crossed and hovered behind the man as he fished about for something in the boot.

Then another came into view, a smaller red car parked behind the white one. Another man had opened the driver's door and was sitting, staring at the road-edge. His hazards were on too.

Something had happened. I had a slight panic when the man turned suddenly from the boot. I was much nearer now and could make out his expression. He looked disgusted, ashen. Maybe she'd said something, or else the problem with the car was a serious one. It crossed my mind that he might ask me for assistance, thinking I perhaps knew something about carburetors or suchlike, which I do, but how the fuck would I explain that I didn't know what he was talking about? He turned away, a grimy black tool bag swinging from the end of his arm, and he was having a discussion with the seated man as I neared. The woman turned and looked me up and down quickly, assessing me, then smiled weakly as I grinned.

"Bonjour monsieur," she said wearily, and the standing man turned, something about the tone she'd used, and looked at me hard, as if daring me to offer to help. I nodded, made my smile fade, and was glad to have to trot across the intersection towards the MacDonalds as the lights turned and a double-lane of cars pulled away and sped up towards me.

I was at the door of the MacDonalds when I realized I didn't have any cash. I'd forgotten to take it from beneath the plastic-lined base of the hold-all. I had the wallet right enough, and it had my passport and driving license and pictures of

the weans and sundry other shite, but no cash. I'd changed two hundred sovs into Euros at the Post Office in Glasgow the day before we left, but gone to the bog on the ferry and slipped it into the bag. No way I could fall asleep with some of those bastards about. There hadn't been any reason or chance to spend since leaving Paris, so no need to dig it out. There was a hefty queue inside the place, mostly youngsters, and I could see the bright pictures above their heads at the counter — ice-creams, big dripping burgers, steaming coffee and tall cold cokes and fantas. I toyed with the idea of nipping in to use the bog, but I didn't need it and getting the smells of the coffee and the grub would just make it worse.

Headed back down towards the intersection. The couple had started arguing, and she seemed to be getting the better of it, laughing dramatically, throwing her head back as he cursed from under the bonnet. I walked further down the road, past the lights, then dived over and doubled-back towards the crossroads.

Must get back. Shouldn't have come this far. Must've been on the go well over two hours, maybe nearer three. Fuck walking back along that road, there wasn't much to see anyway. The sign says River Loing, and it's only then I realize this road off to the left as I approached the intersection becomes a bridge. And some size too, a great new suspension bridge with bright blue pillars maybe sixty, seventy feet tall and like a fan-shape of girders shining in the light, all connected to the ground with what looks like gigantic bolts. The River Loing. It goes past the site, it's at the foot of the garden. Surely it would be a faster route back.

I walk across the bridge, so high above the water, maybe a good fifty feet. Surprised how broad the river is at this point, cause surely it's upstream, it should be narrower, but whatever, it's broad and pretty straight, looks like it would be a safe route back, and a lot more to see down there what with the birds and fish and away from the noise of the traffic too.

But the sun's getting a bit low now, and by the time I get down the steep winding path that leads from the other side of the bridge to the riverside, the tall trees are already obscuring it. I'd better get a move on. There's a group of people with a dog way way further down the path, so I make them like a target and start hoofing it good-style. The path's hard and a wee bit pebbly here and there, it's got like two bare tracks, where maybe cars come down from time to time. There's ducks and the occasional splash as fish break the surface, but they move too fast to see them, there's just the splash then the circles getting bigger. The water's so still and it's green, dirty green, so even at the very edge you can't see anything in there, no stickies or plants or frog spawn or anything like that, and it looks really deep even at the banks. Same kind of trees as were lining the road, loads of them look totally dead, covered wth dark ivy, like maybe some of them have been struck by lightning and just left, and it's really thick, dense, the trees packed together. Some of them are budding, but they're mostly bare, you can see quite far into the forest on both sides of the river, and loads of the older trees have decked it, some of them leaning against neighbours. It's nice and quiet right enough, but it's not exactly what you'd call a tourist attraction.

The river bends a bit, a new stretch comes into view, and there's like this enormous kind of a storage thing on the other side of the river, a series of four like silos, and the writing on it's something about agricole, so maybe it's grain or something, but it's a filthy looking thing, and the old paintwork's sort of grey compared with the first one which has just been painted. I breathe in deeply and catch a waft of the paint, and this thing must

be like two hundred feet away. You can see the pulley and there's two guys on it, they're not painting, maybe just preparing the surface, but seeing the size of these guys against the old surface of this grotty thing, and then realizing how small they look, how big this fucking thing really is, it makes me sort of dizzy and a bit sick. I never did like things that size, like the gas tanks up at Uncle Harry's, those fuckers used to frighten the life out of me, I'd be staring at the pavement for a good five minutes until they were well behind us.

So I do the same, only this time I've got the group ahead to concentrate on, and I speed up a wee bit. The legs are feeling it, but it's good, like they're getting a good stretch, and no harm, tomorrow's likely to be a long day and this exercise won't do any harm, certainly a lot better than sitting in that poxy cabin throwing whisky down my neck.

One of the group turns, looks like a young lassie, maybe ten or that, she's playing with the dog. She sees me, has a wee look for a second, then jogs to catch up with the others. One of the guys pretends he's checking something about the dog and has a wee swatch as well. Fair enough — if I was out with my family and a guy comes up behind walking as fast as I am I'd have a wee look as well. The other two guys in the group sort of hang back a wee bit, there's a laugh, and they stick together, letting the two women and the lassie go ahead. One of them sparks a fag and the blue smoke goes straight up above him, making like a tail attached to his head.

But it's okay anyway. They stop to let the lassie throw sticks at a bottle that's bobbing about on the far side of the river, and the dog's totally dying to jump in, whining and all that, and this is a great laugh for all of them so they're smiling and quite cheery as I reach them.

"Bonjour Monsieur," they all say, it's like almost at exactly the same time, and I nod and say bonjour, bonjour, and the dog runs up and has a sniff, doesn't bark thank fuck, a right big thing, some kind of a Rottweiler and Alsatian mix I'd guess, a right scary looking creature but it's happy enough and the oldest guy, maybe the granda of the lass, he makes a right sharp whistle and the thing instantly spins away back to the lassie and they start laughing again, winding it up, all reaching for sticks to chuck.

Orange and pink streaks low behind the trees on the other side. The stretch is long, no bridges, and yet another factory or something coming up on the other side, and this one's rusty, bogging-looking, like a huge fucking liner that the sea's lifted right up and chucked miles inland. I keep the head down and the sweat's starting to make me a bit cold so I slip on the jacket. Quick glance up — there's no-one else further ahead.

No choice now.

So it's getting that way, I'm used up with asking for Christ and Jesus and Allah and anyone else that might have anything to do with it cause there's no fucking way I'm getting out of this. It's just going on and on and fucking on.

The moon's weak, a sad crescent, the stars are few and far between, there's been more bends, never sharp, but now I can't even guess where the sun went down. There's nothing but the blackness of the ground and the trees, and the only thing that tells me they're there is the slightly lesser blackness of the sky and its reflection on the surface of the river. If there was any fucking wind the river might move a bit and give me a better idea where the fuck it is, but there's no wind, so it's no help and I have to keep stopping to make sure I've still got earth to the right and left of me and amn't getting too close to the edge. If I get too close to the other edge, fair enough, I stumble and fuck these soft sannies and thank all the gods that the

ankle wasn't sprained, but there's no way I'm getting out of this now. And I've already begged Muhammad Ali and my granda and Mary Mother of God and anyone else who's rated by anyone that I'm sorry and I'll do better, and I'll go straight back home and be the man, the perfect man, but it gets worse, it just gets worse so that I can't even pray anymore. My fingers are holding the edge of the jacket sleeves, and even though I usually bite my nails I can feel the pressure of my fingertips in my palm. A fucker makes a noise to the right and I stop, fists raised. Maybe it's a bird, or a boar, or some other fucking thing.

Stop. Don't breathe.
It's hard to even guess how long I've been going now. There's a phone at the site, just up at the main road where I passed when I set out and I promised I'd call her at half-seven. Whatever fucking time it is now, it's not half-seven.

Hours have already passed since coming down from that bastard bridge, but I don't know any more. An hour, two hours, it makes no difference. It got dark about an hour after setting off down the path which started under the bridge, but since darkness fell I've lost track, it could be an hour, it could be three, honestly couldn't guess.

An owl somewhere in the forest to my right lets out a "hoot". Hoot my arse. It's the devil, one of those fucking things you see on the side of churches and that, it's one of them and the fucker's alive, it's sitting in a tree somewhere watching me, waiting till I get underneath it, then the fucker's gonny drop onto me with claws and teeth, eating right through the top of my skull and I can feel it happening, like the way the chimps sometimes eat their weans, they just sit there, it was on the box, they just sit there like it's a worky having his piece, this big fuck-off guy chimp, pure bastard eating his own wean, or maybe one of his pal's weans, just eating right through the wee thing's skull like it's the crust of the piece, just a wee extra tug there and a bit comes away, Jesus the hair's still on it on one side, all bits of brain and blood on the other, it's likely still warm and he's eating it down like it's a fucking sweet, the bastard. Hoot. Aye, hoot hoot, I'm coming your way pal and you know it. You know I've no choice. Noises like that are meant for shitey movies, for old Hammers, not real, not like this, not real-life.

Footsteps, how near I don't know, a crunching of leaves and all the soft stuff you get in old forests, all the wee needles and wee bits of twig built up over the years and something moving across the stuff, definitely. It's there, maybe more than one, yeah, more than one, a crunching here, another noise further, but not much further, and still getting closer.

Whoooooooo...doowwhoooo.
Ya fucking, ya.

Words run out, there's no more talking inside. The prayers run out, vanish. No hope anymore. The arse loosens, and just as well I'm not needing or I'd drop the fucking lot right now. There's no more language in my head, no monologue, dialogue, nothing. Trees stretch up on either side, the river still, the sky a solid block of black heaviness. No escape. Keep going. But Grez is long passed and I know it. It's somewhere far behind me, up that way. It has to be. But no way of getting to it.

Straight on, always watching the dullness of the river so that I won't get too near to it but always liable to wander closer to it because of staring so much. There's no other source of light, it's the lightest form of darkness available. There's no choice.

Then a bridge.
Yes, a bridge. A light from somewhere is mak-

ing it glow in the distance. Speed up. The owl has stayed put, is still making a noise but not so often. Maybe the fucking chimpanzee gargoyle thing stayed put as well. The footsteps have stopped, but impossible to know if the things are still there, just having a rest, maybe just having a listen to check where I am and they can always catch up whenever it suits.

It doesn't seem to be the old bridge of Grez, but maybe, maybe it is. Have to get closer, so step up the pace again though the thighs complain and new muscles are forming between knee and ankle. Fucking murder.

It isn't the old bridge. It's the lock of a canal, and the House guarding the set-up is huge and spotlit and ever-so picturesque. Thin curtains across the ground-floor window, there's blue flickering, someone watching the box. And part of the picture is a large, old blonde Labrador sitting on the rear porch — he comes up the path, barking like fuck. I keep the same pace, but he roars all the more as I go beyond the scope of the automatic spotlight and the dog goes fucking berserk, chucking his body against the wooden fence, going pure raj and howling like a special howl he keeps for foreigners stinking of fear. I wait for the turning of a key, some French guy to dig me up, maybe not even ask any questions just take a shot at me, but there's only the dog having a canary. The darkness swamps about me again as the spotlight clicks off, and the Labrador stops.

Lost in France. Laugh aloud when it hits me, that I'm living the song-sheet of a classic Tyler smash, but even then, the barking dog is being missed, and I want him back as proof that this darkness and lifelessness can't go on forever.

Maybe it's time to consider bedding down. I'm fucked. The legs are pulsing, hot, that way when you know cramp will grab a hold right away if you point your toe or lift your heel like that, the small of the back is piping up too. A barge tethered to this side looms, makes shape, soft silhouette against the river but only if I look away from it — dry inside perhaps, and at least I've my wooly bunnet inside the jacket. It's plausible, for a moment.

But I have to be near Grez. Have to be. Maybe back the way across the other side, but surely it's close. The fucking town's called Grez-sur-Loing, the sign at the bridge said Loing. How many fucking Loings can there be?

It gets even darker. I can't remember ever feeling this afraid, and wouldn't want to even if I could. I can still see the trees, thick, some branchless, but only if I look away from them, leaving them to linger at the edge of vision, creeping slowly past as I move on. The river makes no sound, but fish are moving, perhaps birds swimming, and it's like I'm having to smell and hear the river to avoid getting too near it, maybe the coolness of the water can be registered by my face even though I'm not aware of it. Maybe. Something's keeping me on the path, and only the occasional tuft or sudden dip makes me stop, double-check the next foot or so with my trainer-toe. And away over there, in the woods, there is a light. A sudden voice, loud, male, far away, echoes from the direction of the light, and another male voice shouts a reply. The hunters? Maybe they go after the boar at night. They'll have dogs too, and maybe they'll get a scent of me. Thank fuck there's no wind to take my sweat and fear towards them. That movie. Jesus, that fucking movie starts to come into my head, and I try to stop the thought, cancel it before there is even the chance to recall the name of it, but it comes back, the Blair, the Blair Witch fucking, fuck it, that bit where the lassie opens up the wee blue tartan package, fuck it, fuck off. Grip

the edge of the sleeves harder, make two fists solid, stop dead, I know something's going to happen, right now, here it's —

Jesus fuck. The blast, leaves and twigs being pushed through, parting, the noise deafening, and some duck or other bird comes out and past me, wings clapping like gloved hands. The leaves and twigs rustle back into their original positions and the bird clatters against the surface of the river as it lands. The Witch Project, the bit where she's about to die and she must know it, the panic, battering down a flight of stairs with, fuck it, no, no, the bloody handprints of children, dozens, maybe hundreds of hand-prints, then, Jesus, no, fuck, there's that voice again, closer, and a laugh in it too, like there's a joke underway and a tiny light, red and orange flicks as tree trunks move to conceal it again. But it's there, in the woods, in there. She saw her pal standing in the corner facing the wall and that's when she must've known, cause that's the story they'd heard, that was the folk-lore, something behind her, something started as a joke kills her before getting the other one in the corner, standing like a wean in school waiting for a telling-off, only you don't get a telling-off this time, you get torn apart by something so scary you can't even imagine it, your guts would drop right away from you if you ever caught a glimpse of it, even a half-second's worth. My jacket torn into ragged-edged squares, and she'll be asked to try and identify me from the bits and pieces — a hand there, part of an ear there, a bit dried-out but all that's left. Try explaining that to the wee man, to baby Joy. Jesus. No. No. Jesus, please.

The fire is closer now, and there's a dog right enough, the bastard is letting rip. The voices are high, laughing, and there's a female involved as well. Not kids. A Sunday night in the woods, maybe a carry-out and a few joints, maybe a wee session on the floor of the forest among the moss and sticks. To join them would be safety, but how to explain, how to get near without the dog having me. Tread more softly, slowly, get past, get away, keep going. Don't stop.

Fuck me, no. The symbols made of wood hanging from the branches. That was the bit, that was the bit gave me the nightmares, but that was ages ago and I never got them again. Now it's back, black and white in the picture-house, now real and brighter than it was in the film, a million times more vivid when it's against the blackness in front of me. Someone made signs out of twigs and hung them from the branches, letting them know it was there, maybe trying to give them a chance or just saying, this is it pal, this is the way you're going, it's the way I want you to go and I'm waiting for you, waiting right here until you come into view. I must be remembering it for a reason, it must be a sign, a warning. It's actually happening. Stranger things happen, you couldn't write some of it, stranger than any fucking fiction. Maybe it's me this time, my turn to become an interesting gory story in the fucking paper, or maybe that last bit on the news. Maybe it'll be a scandal, maybe the agency will get exposed as the cheapskate fucker slave-traders they are, that'll justify it all, bring some good out it all.

Turn about, the moon has gone. There's a curved sliver of dirty-grey in the blackness where the crescent has been clouded over, and it's going down anyway, heading behind the trees on the other side. The stars have all gone. The Plough was ahead, looking wonky and not the same as it does at home, something not right there, even with the stars, but they've all gone now anyway. Another plane heading that same direction, must be a flight path for Paris and it's miles away, a passen-

ger, jet maybe, dull distant throbbing but with it so dark the lights seem bright and clear, red winking before the clouds take it as well, everything being swallowed.

The left foot goes down, I'm toppling, reach for the ground, hope to grab it, reaching right, have to stay on the path, but I'm on my arse at the edge, the steep dry earth bank crumbles under my fingers. It's okay. Soft landing, but trying to get back up, the legs are refusing to work, the cramp is going to start. Sudden heat on the left forearm where the jacket rode up, must have been some kind of nettle, the itchiness is sudden and sore, feels like a hundred ants all biting at the same time, There must be dock-leaves here same as at home, but fumbling about for one I'd likely find more nettles instead. The cramp is coming. Squat, back up straight, do it again. Pull the calve up behind the arse, one at a time, stretch it all. Have to keep going.

One step at a time. Something clicking in the bones where hip and thigh are connected, no pain but something not right. The breathing is getting faster but I'm hardly moving. The air tastes warm, smells of water and leaves. My eyes are closed, then they're open, then closed again. Fingertips to the eyelids to check they're working properly. Breathing so fast, lungs aren't working, breathing with throat only, even then the mouth is opening, taking more, like a pump has been stuck through the sternum, but it's not catching, not working. Stop, reach for the ground again, the twin tracks in the grass, the earth dry, grass cool. Let the head go down a little, just for a minute, maybe taking the weight off the head will help the breathing, use less energy. Pebble digging into that knee, move a bit, no don't, the cramp's ready to spark. Keep the eyes closed, darkness is okay then, it's the way it should be.

Pinkness, light, growing stronger, taking a shape. The feel of warm velvet under the fingertips, the scent of skin, baby Joy is there, it's that picture, the one of her in her bright pink sleep-suit, the one with yellow bears, and that big white fleecy bodywarmer thing Mum got her. She's laughing about something, whatever it is that babies find funny, now the picture frozen and that same expression, sideways and from slightly below, so she's looking down at me holding the camera, she doesn't know what I'm doing but she smiles at whatever and no teeth there, she grimaces and rubs the gums together, blue eyes shining like she's determined, she'll do whatever it is she wants to do. And this face is laughing at me, laughing at the daft things Daddies do, how they don't make sense to a baby, any baby.

The laugh drags the remaining breath from me, but I want to laugh so much that the air rushes in, the lungs fill with cool air, the throat opens, and I laugh and cry at the same time, keeping the head down but not caring any more where the fuckers are, whether they're listening or not. My fingers feel her face, so small and warm and soft, thumb brushing over her nose, making her serious, making her pause before she laughs again with that growl, that noise from deep in her tiny chest, from the heart of her.

The face fades, the memory of her smell is forgotten. I get up and walk.

Abid is up when I finally get in. He slept most of the day. I've been away eight hours. Must've done twenty miles easy. Thank fuck that road turned up when it did. It took me over the river, then another river, and it must be that the river split. I was walking along a canal. It must've been dark when the split came. I was about six kilometers past Grez, hoofed it back along the road. There was a

phone box in a village and I tried calling home, reversing the charges, but it took ages to explain to the lassie what I wanted to do and when she did eventually make the connection the line was engaged. She would've been worried, maybe calling her Mum or my Mum.

But maybe it was all for the best. Turns out there was a barney right enough, but it wasn't Johnson and Gerry, it was old Jim and an English guy called Tommy who took exception to the price he was charging for a shot. Turns out Jim had another litre bottle planked and hadn't even let on. Tommy cracked when Jim produced it and asked for another five euros apiece, set about him with a tumbler. The cops aren't long away, Tommy's nicked, Jim's at the hospital. He's definitely lost an eye, and had some kind of a stroke as well, maybe a heart-attack.

I crash on the bed. It smells of feet and bad breath, but so fuck, it's only the one night and I could sleep for Scotland — and anyway, whatever time it is tomorrow, wherever it is, I'll be on that first bus to Paris, and they know what they can do with their bastard turnips.

Concrete Social Interventions

Interview with Pascale Jeann e of the artists’ group WochenKlausur

We first met Pascale Jeannée in 2001 when she visited Glasgow with two other members of WochenKlausur to be interviewed for a commission within the Reputations public art programme that we have been developing for The Castlemilk Environmental Trust.

Pascale had been our main contact at WochenKlausur during the e-mail and telephone conversations regarding the group’s possible involvement in the project. After a remarkable presentation of their previous projects WochenKlausur were appointed. We spent a couple of days together making site visits and discussing many of the issues covered in the following interview.

Pascale and the two other members returned to Glasgow to undertake further research, hold strategic meetings and conceive of their project. Pascale was central to the development of this project and was extraordinarily dedicated to the collective aims of WochenKlausur, to the expansion of the dynamics of art in the public realm and the aims of *Reputations* itself. Throughout our dialogues she revealed her intellectual rigour and capacity for generosity and fun on many occasions.

Earlier this year we learned from WochenKlausur that Pascale Jeannée had suddenly died of heart failure at an incredibly young age. Her loss has marked WochenKlausur as extraordinarily as did her presence. This interview is now published in memory of a remarkable artist whom we must now miss professionally and personally.

Jason E. Bowman and Rachel Bradley (Co-Curators of Reputations) and Matthew Finkle (Project Manager, The Castlemilk Environmental Trust)

Variant: Could you describe WochenKlausur, the way you work and the work you do?

Pascale Jeannée: Today many artists are devoting their efforts to the challenge of setting processes in motion instead of leaving objects behind. WochenKlausur are such a group of artists who commit themselves to addressing identifiable social problems.

WochenKlausur has been carrying out social interventionist projects at the invitation of art institutions since 1993. WochenKlausur roughly translates as “weeks of closure”, ‘Klausur’ being related to the English words ‘enclosure’, ‘seclusion’ and ‘cloister’. The group’s projects are collective efforts that take place within a few weeks in the concentrated atmosphere of a closed-session working situation. A strictly limited timeframe gives rise to an unusual concentration of the participants’ energies, allowing the interventions to be realized quickly. The inviting institution’s exhibition space has served as an office for WochenKlausur during this period.

For the Vienna Secession in 1992, WochenKlausur was invited to work on addressing a local situation. Karlsplatz, the plaza outside the exhibition building, was a heavily frequented meeting place for homeless people. Within the duration of an exhibition, the group worked in closed session to develop and realize a small but concrete measure to improve conditions for these people. WochenKlausur created a mobile clinic. Since then healthcare has been provided free of charge to more than 700 patients monthly.

Since 1993, WochenKlausur has realized 14 projects, including a shelter for drug-addicted women in Zurich, at the invitation of the Venice Biennial the group set up eight language schools for refugees in Kosovo, and in 2000 an agency for bringing project teaching to schools in Fukuoka, Japan, was established.

V: Does working by the invitation of arts institutions place limitations on WochenKlausur’s practice, yet perhaps provide access to funding and resources that might not otherwise be available?

PJ: There are two areas of independent decision: You can choose the subject you deal with and you can chose to work with, or reject, the institutions that offer you co-operation.

Art is awarded its status through its recognition, such sanctioning comes about within institutional mechanisms. Art institutions can reaffirm a traditional, object-orientated understanding of practice or can participate in its transformation.

Understanding of what can constitute art changes when the term is used less to subsume fetishistic characteristics and mercantile aspects, and instead designates immaterial works that contribute to the transformation and improvement of ecological, political and social conditions. If WochenKlausur works at the invitation of art institutions, the institutions are acting to anchor Activist art practice in human consciousness.

WochenKlausur’s intention is in two ways a political one. On the one hand, each project is a small, concrete contribution to the improvement of our co-existence and the living circumstances of fringe groups. On the other hand, the interventions are intended to demonstrate the opportunities art has to selectively intervene in real life, i.e. in social, political or economic conditions.

Beyond establishing projects and ensuring a basis for their support politically, providing for their financing has always been an important part of WochenKlausur’s work. The funding of a project sometimes requires WochenKlausur employing canny strategies. Our experience from the completed projects shows that in many fields an unorthodox approach often opens doors and offers usable solutions that would not have been achievable through conventional methods and institutions. As such, the art institutions’ ‘cultural capital’ has been useful when seeking to circumvent bureaucratic hierarchies and mobilize decision-makers from politics, civil administration and the media.

V: How do you sufficiently inform yourselves in readiness for a project, who do you consult and what roles will they have in the project?

PJ: The focus of our research depends on the recommendations of artists and different kinds of experts living in the city, on what was being discussed in the local media during the last months, and last but not least on the ideas that arise discussing strategies for the intervention.

V: WochenKlausur’s projects have set time-frames within which they are to be realised. This deadline may reflect a very real sense of urgency about the conditions that your projects, in part, attempt to deal with. But, does a strictly limited time-frame for the interventions allow for sufficient development of the project through interaction with those who you are working on behalf of?

PJ: The subjects we deal with are very widespread. For this reason we have to define very strict boundaries for what we intend to change. If we do not define a concrete goal we will not succeed in bringing about any real change. Sometimes it is difficult to solve a problem within a strictly limited time-frame but on the other hand it sometimes gives rise to an unusual concentration of the participants’ energies, allowing the planned interventions to be realized very quickly.

There are different aspects to the projects at different times. Some are based on the participation of the people with whom we are concerned but with others such an integration would not be effective for the project’s success. Some problems can only be solved through political negotiations.

V: What are your criticisms of increasingly fashionable interventionist projects which have a cathartic function, such as the representational ‘Homeless’ art you refer to on your web site?

PJ: WochenKlausur believes that art has got its big chance to take part in the shaping of society and of course there are different opinions of how this can work. There are artists and critics who see interventionist art as a mirror that shows us problems and relationships, others see interventionist art as a kind of depiction of an utopian world where everything is better, and still others want to see it as a way of healing the human condition by changing its formal environment.

WochenKlausur prefers the approach which accepts the boundaries of what can be accomplished. This means not setting the hurdles too low or too high. If artists set them too low, what they do is trivial. If they set them too high, they always want to change everything but finally wind up not changing anything. Thus in the art of intervention we prefer an approach which is effective. One where clear goals are defined on starting and which ends with concrete results.

Effectiveness does not have to be a criteria for art in general. Nevertheless intervention without results is not really an intervention. It is only the attempt at an intervention or it is just a show.

WochenKlausur is sceptical against fashionable trends that disappear as quickly as they come up. We do not criticise the fact that art institutions invite artists to take part at an exhibition that follows a specific topic, but rather the fact that artists tend to show their work under the heading of an exhibition without any adaptation to its content. Such homoganzation of different approaches and methodologies provokes misunderstandings concerning the intended message of the artists and of the exhibition makers as well.

The concept of interventionist art has undergone an inflationary trend in recent years. In the tradition of many artists who understood how to actively take part in the shaping of society, WochenKlausur develop concrete solutions for problems that are solvable. We are very strict with the use of the word ‘intervention’ and we would never change its meaning according to what has become trendy.

V: Could you respond further to the question on your web site: “Does not WochenKlausur encourage the trend in government towards abandoning responsibility for social issues?”, as you also state that: “The criticism that WochenKlausur’s efforts could be merely treating and hiding the symptoms—where the state should have acted to bring about fundamental improvements—is justified?”

PJ: In society, we are used to delegating certain tasks to certain experts, but there are tasks that cannot be delegated to politicians, social workers or experts. Artists go in for other tasks than they used to do, and it could also be their responsibility to find solutions to problems in our society.

If an artist has an idea of how to decrease poverty in their area, should they first become a politician to realize their vision, or should they



drop the idea because it's apparently not up to them to deal with these sorts of issues?

WochenKlausur believes that every human being has responsibilities.

V: Is the sustainability of a project a concern when planning it, and what is your relationship to them on completion?

PJ: All of our interventions are intended to be sustainable, which means that their continu-

ing functioning can be guaranteed. Still, one of our projects nearly failed under these terms: Some months after we had opened a shelter for drug addicted women in Zurich, we were informed that it had to close again because of massive pressure in the neighbourhood. In 1995 (one year after our intervention) an altered form of the

WochenKlausur group came together again with the goal to bring the project to an effective close, in which we finally succeeded. But still it's true: The more projects WochenKlausur has realized the more difficult it gets to keep in touch with their co-ordinators.

V: WochenKlausur have been developing a project for Castlemilk, Glasgow, could you describe your intended project and what you hope to achieve?

PJ: We were invited to present our projects to The

Castlemilk Environment Trust by Jason E. Bowman and Rachel Bradley who are curating a programme of public art commissions on behalf of the Trust.

In April 2001, having been selected, WochenKlausur undertook a period of research in Castlemilk. From this we were able to define the area of intervention well in advance of the project starting. This was an interesting opportunity to develop our practice, being able to define the intervention before the working period of the project.

In Castlemilk there is a lack of facilities for teenage girls to come together. They have the feeling that there is nothing to do. WochenKlausur's research demonstrated that these young people want more opportunities to meet, socialise and make new friends beyond existing boundaries. For young people, leisure facilities are a crucial aspect of community life. They provide a public meeting place for friends outside the home which retains a certain intimacy and is not as controlled as school.

Our proposal for Castlemilk is to establish an indoor facility that would be used as a meeting point and creative space for teenage girls.

We'd like to open up a space where girls between the ages of 13 and 17 can meet in privacy. The project seeks to improve the availability of convenient social facilities for girls. The building would be divided into several units made available to small groups. What the participants actually do with their units would be completely up to them; they just have to use their space actively. To the greatest possible extent, the facility should be

self-managed and autonomous.

Small groups (a minimum of three girls) will take over responsibility for a certain portion of the space which they can use for any reasonable purpose they choose. Within this frame, what they do there is completely up to them. Some of them might use their space for talking with friends, sharing music, whatever. They can use the space as long as they want for free, with the only stipulation being that they continue to actively use and maintain it.

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Out for the Night

Martha Brophy

RIGHT: The Birmingham Six on the day of their release

MOJO (Miscarriages of Justice Organisation) was launched at The Houses of Parliament on 14th March 2001, the tenth anniversary of the release of the Birmingham Six and the 'Royal Commission into the Judicial System'. On the day of the Birmingham Six's release, the then Home Secretary Douglas Hurd repealed Parliament to set up this commission which in turn led to the creation of the 'Criminal Case Review Commission': an *independent* body that looks at alleged miscarriages of justice.

Set up by Paddy Hill, John McManus and others, MOJO was disappointed with the media coverage their launch received: BBC1 and ITV covered it regionally, Sky covered it until 5pm, and Channel 4 refused to cover it at all, saying they didn't want to give a publicity stunt to MOJO! This lack of interest by the mainstream media surrounds miscarriages of justice.

MOJO was set up out of a dire need to help innocent people both before and after their release from prison. Paddy Hill had promised a number of people who were victims of miscarriages of justice that he would help them in their fight for freedom and justice. It took him seven years until, finally, the Bridgewater Four were released. During this time more and more people started contacting Paddy Hill with their cases and he became a sort of one-man crusader. He met John McManus, the co-ordinator of MOJO Scotland, in 1994 when John got involved in raising money for the Bridgewater campaign. At first, people's reaction to Paddy Hill and John McManus and the issues they were raising was that they were scare mongering, and that they were a wee bit on the left and a bit loud. But as time went on and more and more miscarriages of justice were coming to light, it became clear that there was a problem, a real problem with the judicial system in the UK. The police, judicial and legal systems do not recognise this problem. Miscarriages of justice are always seen as individual, isolated cases, not only by the judicial system but also by the media who often only cover stories regionally. If you look at the number of cases since the Birmingham Six, the incredible amount of time people spend in prison going through the appeals process, and the fact that there has never, ever been any prosecution of police officers or lawyers involved in a miscarriage of justice, then surely something must be wrong.

John Kilmarra is one such case. He was released in March 2000 after spending nineteen years for the wrongful conviction of the murder of a manager of a betting shop. His caseworker at the 'Criminal Justice Review Commission' noticed that there were six or seven missing A4 sheets from his file, so she sent a request for these papers, and any others, to the Home Office. Back came the missing papers and a box containing two-hundred and one statements accompanied by a letter to the defense signed by the Junior Council for the case, Maurice Kay. The defense never received these statements. At Kilmarra's first appeal in 1983, Maurice Kay was again involved: he was the Junior Prosecution Council, and he still did not mention the two-hundred and one statements. It took another sixteen years before John Kilmarra was released. Maurice Kay is now a Judge sitting on Appeal Courts. So the judicial system not only refuses to look at gross negligence by those involved in miscarriages of justice, but at this level individuals actually seem to be rewarded. In the case of the Birmingham Six, the police officers involved received early

retirement with good pay packages. Until the compensation was finally completed for the Six earlier this year, these officers had received more money from the public purse than the innocent men.

MOJO Scotland was launched at their first 'Out for the Night' benefit in Glasgow's G2 club in January 2002. They started to get in touch with actors, musicians, comedians, DJs, etc. as another way of getting their message out to ordinary people. They saw the necessity of this as an indictment of the mainstream media. The ethos behind the 'Out for the Night' events, of which there has now been three in Glasgow, is to raise awareness about ongoing cases of miscarriages of justice and as John McManus puts it "if MOJO is going to put on a night for someone inside they're going to make it a good one!" The first part of the event usually takes the shape of actors reading texts from biographies, fiction or other publications¹ surrounding the area of miscarriages of justice and prison. At the launch event in January texts were read from Jack London's 'The Star Rover', 'Forever Lost, Forever Gone' by Paddy Joe Hill, and a court scene was re-enacted by four actors on stage from 'Indictment: Trial by Fire' by TC Campbell and Reg McKay. With accounts of harrowing stories, this consciousness raising part is often difficult for the audience. The second part is spirit lifting with bands, stand-up comedians and DJs so that people leave at the end of the night not feeling low, or that nothing can be done or changed. The next day they can reflect on what they have heard and if it's been a good night maybe what they've heard will sink in more succinctly.

John McManus sees this in the tradition of 'conscious clubbing': you can have a good time and raise awareness about issues at the same time.

'Out for the Night' also wants to bring in people from lots of different communities. Miscarriages of justice don't just affect the person in prison, it affects their whole family: sons, daughters, wives, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, a miscarriage of justice has a deep effect on all of them. Often the relatives are a silent minority but unfortunately a growing minority as more and more cases come to light. So it's difficult for MOJO to know who will come along to their events; it's not only the politically aware and active but also those who have a personal involvement.

'Out for the Night' events are for everyone and anyone. John feels that there's an inverted snobbery amongst people who organise benefits: they think that an audience should turn up just because it's a good cause. However, he feels that in these days of information overdrive you've got to use all sort of subtle ways to bring people along. That's one of the reasons they use actors, comedy, music, etc. as a way of appealing to already existing audiences. He uses the analogy of a wedding for the events, where people of all ages come together in a celebration; something for everyone. Perhaps

someone does not particularly want to stay until 3am in the morning clubbing but they can come along for the readings or live music. The important thing is a cross-over of people of different ages from different backgrounds who are talking about the issues raised; something akin to the idea of Workingmen's and Social Clubs where the money raised goes back to helping good causes into the community.

Without wanting to offend, John McManus thinks that it's easy for people to get involved with something like Amnesty International, for example, as its focus is somewhere else in the world. He feels it's much more difficult to take a stance in your own country. People, especially those from the legal system or with public profiles, who come along and get involved in MOJO events really help contribute to MOJO's credibility and legitimacy.

The events are also there as a platform for new talent. MOJO is rarely refused if they ask a band, actor or comedian to get involved. People are genuinely interested and do feel responsible. The prison system is meant to be there to protect society and therefore all miscarriages of justice are being done in our name. By getting involved with MOJO people are taking on a responsibility for these miscarriages.

While MOJO was set up to campaign for innocent people in prison fighting for their freedom, this is only half the battle, and in some sense the real battle begins when they are released. While in prison the innocent are treated as troublemakers and once they're released it's seen as some kind of embarrassment. The Birmingham Six were eventually released in 1991, this was also the year that John McCarthy and Terry Waite were released from Beirut. The Birmingham Six received travel costs to their home and nothing else, the British Government arranged sixteen weeks of debriefing and counselling for John McCarthy, Terry Waite and their families at RAF Lynham with top psychologist Gordon Turnbull. The Birmingham Six were asked to leave court by the back entrance, which they refused to do. If the government did not realise the psychological trauma that the six men had suffered at being wrongly imprisoned for sixteen and a half years then it should have been clear to them by 1992/3 when psychologist Dr. Adrian Grounds assessed Paddy Hill for his compensation claim.

Intrigued by the lack of study with such cases, Dr. Grounds went on to study fourteen other people who suffered miscarriages of justice and subsequently spent long amounts of time in prison. This was not undertaken with direct government funding but through his university. He drew damning conclusions from his study about the post-traumatic stress and the visual traumatic memory of experiences while in prison over long periods of time.

Sir David Calcutt was appointed assessor for the amount of compensation the Birmingham Six should receive; his report was finished last year. Calcutt concluded in his report that a block amount of money should be given for the first year

(continues on page 28)



the investigation of Strathclyde Police by Fife Police, the Chief Constable of which was until three years ago the Assistant Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police. On the night of the eviction no charges were brought against any members of SSAC. However, in January 2002 after the report by Fife Police was given to the Procurator Fiscal, nine people—all members of SSAC, seven of which are Muslim—were charged with various offences relating to the night of the eviction. SSAC made eighteen complaints about Strathclyde Police behaviour to the Fife Police Inquiry, twelve of these have been abandoned and six are under review by the Procurator Fiscal. SSAC don't believe that the six under review will go any further until all the court cases against SSAC members have been heard.

'South Side Against Closure' have now been in existence for almost two years. They are fighting for local democracy, for their voices to be heard. They have lost all faith in local Councillors who are meant to be in power to represent them. Councillors are furiously rubbishing the survey SSAC carried out and accuse them of wanting to hijack council tax money for their own ends. It is obvious to anyone who has come in contact with this campaign that rather than taking from the community they continue to give: their time, their expertise as individuals, their intellect and creativity. At the time in Glasgow when there was demonstrations against the murder of Firsat Yildiz Dag, a Kurdish refugee—where demonstrators had to run a gauntlet of local white youths and adults in Sighthill—across the city Asian youth, white housewives and children, elderly Asian men, shopkeepers and professionals were all coming together to fight for their community.

SSAC meet every Monday evening, for more information on their continuing campaign see: www.saveourpool.co.uk

Notes

- 1 In fact it transpired that the Council made this decision in October 2000 and told no-one. Local Labour Councillors although aware of the proposed closure simply kept quiet. No assistance was given to the community or users to argue a case against closure and the only "offer" was to relocate and "direct" users to "state of the art" pools 3 and 4 miles away.
- 2 A questionnaire was piloted extensively in the community in order to be sure the questions were both appropriate to the task and technically viable. As a result community members themselves made suggestions and assisted in the development of the instrument and study design. Every attempt was made to ensure that the questions allowed all views to be expressed from the wide range of community members. There emerged a strong view that the questionnaire should be administered on a face to face basis so that an opportunity could be given to respondents to explain or expand on their views as they addressed specific questions. A team of local people involved in the campaign were given training in face to face interviewing in order to ensure rigour and consistency.
3. State of the art pools are being built with European and government money and through SportScotland government money. SportScotland has given £21.5 million to Glasgow for sport and recreation facilities. It has produced major statements about the need to regenerate communities and implement social inclusion strategies—in association with the Scottish Executive, the documents 'The Role of Sport in Regenerating Deprived Communities', and what it calls "the settled will" of the Scottish people in a document called 'Sport 21'. Both are replete with statements about social inclusion, health, recreation and sport.

The Glasgow strategy of closing old pools and building new ones (with SportScotland money) has ignored the advice and recommendations of its funders. For example the document above states clearly: "All providers should evaluate cur-

rent programmes and the extent to which they are addressing all aspects of social inclusion." In the case of the Govanhill Pool closure Glasgow City Council has not done this. The council did not conduct a social audit as to the consequences of closure. It ignored all of the research evidence about the need to keep local and recreational sports facilities open particularly in urban areas in a context of social inclusion. It can be easily demonstrated that the action to close runs counter to the Council's own policies, SportScotlands' targets on social inclusion, those of the Scottish and Westminster Parliament's. Guidelines and recent research on local community consultation from the Scottish Parliament's Executive have been ignored.

Out for the Night
(continued from page 26)

of wrongful imprisonment. After the first year in prison he stated that the person becomes accustomed to prison life and therefore it becomes easier for them. For this reason he introduced a sliding scale downwards for each year spent in prison thereafter. Calcutt retired two days after he submitted his report, he never met Paddy Hill, his lawyer or Dr. Grounds. MOJO believe that the Calcutt report will become a precedent, setting the agenda for future compensation claims. It took the Birmingham Six eleven years after their release to finally receive full compensation based on Calcutt's sliding scale. So for somebody like the recently released Robert Brown, who spent twenty-five years innocent in prison, he will get very little for his final year inside because life had become so easy for him... and who knows how many years it will take him to get it?

Sir David Calcutt's findings are in stark contrast to those of Dr. Adrian Grounds', an expert in the field.

MOJO want to set up a halfway house for people who have suffered miscarriages of justice so that when they are released they have somewhere to go: somewhere they can get support from people who have suffered in similar ways, counselling, a place of rehabilitation, a place that their families can use as well. They also want to set up a monitoring group. Most people would see this as an obvious step but this initiative comes from those who have suffered, not those in power. It will be a long hard struggle for MOJO to raise the necessary funds to create such a place. John McManus believes that those who hold the purse strings know exactly what's going on but don't want to admit the legal system is not perfect. In contrast, the people on the street know that nothing is perfect, that mistakes are always made. Even within the MOJO organisation mistakes will be made but he hopes that they will be open and honest enough to admit them. This is something that the judicial system and the government have not so far been willing to do. If they did they would be funding an organisation like MOJO and would see them as a checks and balance to the judicial system. MOJO are not saying that *all* police, lawyers and judges are bent. What they are saying is there *are* corrupt police, lawyers and judges and that they shouldn't be in the positions of power that they are. The whole idea of the judicial system, the government and the media playing down the significance of all the miscarriages of justice over the last ten years is to allay public fear. They want to assure us that there are no serious problems with the police and the judicial system. Yet, survey after survey show that people don't trust the police because there is plainly one law for them and one law for us. For MOJO this just can't go on. It divides society more and more and causes more and more misery. The prison population in the UK is growing at an accelerated rate and therefore there is bound to be an increase in miscarriages of justice. The 'Criminal

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"GLAS are a Glasgow based co-operative of architects, teachers, writers and urban activists who are committed to fighting all manifestations of socio-spatial inequality, exploitation and deprivation." They produce the magazine GlasPaper.
5. Making Waves, 23rd-4th March 2002, Langside Halls, Glasgow

Two day community conference reflecting the impact campaigns can make locally and globally.

Case Review Commission' have already had over four thousand cases lodged with them to date.

Ideally MOJO will get public funds to set up their halfway house. At the moment they are fighting innocent people's cases and raising public awareness. They have clear ideas of how their organisation should take shape. They have charitable status and have a management committee formed of individuals with backgrounds in the legal system, human rights, and those who have suffered miscarriages of justice themselves. As the organisation grows they are aware of potential problems. Both John McManus and Paddy Hill may want to take a step back in the future. They want to put safeguards within the organisation so that it doesn't become a 'toothless tiger'; they want to ensure an equality in pay where the maximum wage that any employee can receive is that of the skilled worker's wage; they want to offer students in relevant fields such as law, journalism, psychology, double the minimum wage to work part-time; they want to make sure no one individual can bring in their own agenda to the detriment of the organisation and/or the people they are fighting for and supporting. They will continue to raise awareness and money by organising fund raising events, receiving donations, and putting on cultural events like the 'Out for the Night' benefits. One project recently initiated involves the Glasgow based artist Michael Fullerton. Paddy Hill approached Michael with the view to purchasing his painting of Lady Cosgrove, the first female judge in Scotland, exhibited in his MFA exhibition at Tramway earlier this year. Michael felt it inappropriate for this painting to be hung in the MOJO office so they decided that he would paint portraits of people who had suffered miscarriages of justice. Michael met Robert Brown before his release and photographed Robert, his mother and his aunts; he also photographed T.C. Campbell and Paddy Hill. The artist is currently working on these full-length portraits that will also reference particular Gainsborough paintings. It is intended that these paintings will be auctioned to raise money for MOJO.

If you're a DJ, actor, musician, artist and would like to get involved with a MOJO project or if you're involved in law, psychiatry, journalism, documentary making or web design and would like to volunteer your services, then get in touch with:

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Notes

1. 'Indictment: Trial by Fire', T.C. Campbell and Reg MCKay, Canongate; 'Forever Lost, Forever Gone', Paddy Joe Hill Published, Bloomsbury; 'The Star Rover', Jack London, Canongate (Rebel Inc.).

Making Waves

Martha Brophy

Govanhill—‘you don’t know if your in Bengal or Donegal’—is situated in the South side of Glasgow within the Shettleson parliamentary constituency. This is the unhealthiest constituency in the UK and at the last general election had the lowest voter turn out in Scotland and the second lowest in the UK. Govanhill Pool is an Edwardian Baroque building with three swimming pools, a sauna, gym and Turkish suite. Purpose built and part of the area since 1914, it is still in excellent condition. In January 2001, Charlie Gordon, leader of Glasgow City Council, announced that the pool was to be closed. The Council set a date of closure for 31st March that same year despite a petition signed by twelve thousand citizens protesting the decision.

The Council gave the local community and the South side of Glasgow just fourteen working days to respond to this proposed closure.¹ No formal announcement was made. The closure came to light in the Council’s annual budget proposals that were not made available to the community, though a snippet about the proposed closure appeared in the press. In response, local people formed the ‘Glasgow’s Govanhill Pool: South Side Against Closure’ (SSAC) and began a sit-in of the building on the 21st March. The Council enlisted the support of the police to break into the building and effectively closed it on the 29th March. Soon after the Council drained the water from the pools. SSAC’s occupation of Govanhill Pool lasted one-hundred and forty-one days before finally being forcefully and violently brought to an end by Strathclyde Police on the 7th August 2001, acting on the orders of Glasgow City Council and in support of the Sheriff’s Officers. Throughout the occupation SSAC maintained a picket line outside the building. This became the “hub of the community” and continued after the eviction until March 2002. SSAC continue in their fight for Govanhill Pool to be re-opened as public swimming pools with a health living centre for the benefit of the whole community.

In the autumn of 2001, after a good eight months of campaigning, SSAC decided to do what the Council had failed to do: consult the local people. ‘Govanhill Pool: the impact of closure and a consultation with former users, a study’ was designed by SSAC members who were working in academia, local government, planning and health services, and who were experienced in research methods. Resources did not allow for a ‘scientific sampling’ of respondents. However, as the study proceeded and the results were analysed the method of ‘distributing’ and interviewing revealed that a cross-section of the South side community and pool users had in fact been effectively included in their survey. The survey therefore contained the best of both methodological worlds: it was a survey based on and contained ‘hard’ data, whilst it built a qualitative picture of what people really felt at the time. In this sense, the findings and the interpretation of them can be taken to be rigorous and valid.

The survey’s questionnaire² took account of age, gender, health, employment and ethnicity. Of all those surveyed 55% were no longer swimming. The results showed that the closure had a greater effect on those over 60, with 69% of survey participants over 60 no longer swimming compared with 54% of 41-60 year olds, 52% of 26-40 year olds and 40% of 16-25 year olds.

Within the small sample of Indian and Pakistani swimmers the survey revealed that since closure 90% of survey participants had not used other facilities. Throughout the campaign the



Council had been made aware that the new facilities which people had been directed to were particularly unsuitable for much of the Asian population: the glass walls and open design of pools at Gorbals and Bellahouston are prohibitive to Muslim women in particular. Govanhill Pool as an Edwardian enclosed swimming pool permitted both private and segregated swimming for men and women, a feature which led to the pool being identified in a SportScotland³ study on ‘Ethnic Minorities and Sport’ as a best practise example of breaking down barriers to participation in sport.

77% of survey participants who were unemployed were no longer using other facilities, compared to 40.7% of those in full-time employment. 68.7% of those who were sick or disabled and not fit to work were no longer using other facilities, and 75% of those retired.

Car owners were more likely to be using other swimming facilities than non-car owners and most car owners were in full or part-time employment. Car ownership did have an influence on whether full-time employees were still swimming.

So, the closure of Govanhill Pool has most severely effected the old, the poor, the sick and disabled, the unemployed and ethnic minorities. So much for social inclusion.

SSAC’s study concluded that:

- the public want the baths to be reopened
- all three swimming pools should be reopened
- the rest of the building should be developed into a healthy living centre
- the facility should remain in public ownership but with real local representation to avoid the problems of the past

To have the local resources and personnel to take on the responsibility of carrying out your own survey is to the credit of the inspired ‘South Side Against Closure Campaign’. Other organisations have also contributed their support to the campaign, such as ‘Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space’⁴—who provided publicity for the survey at the ‘Making Waves’ two day conference organised by SSAC in March 2002⁵—and students from Glasgow School of Art.

Earlier on in the year in February 2001, Glasgow City Council, under pressure from campaigners and after announcing the pool’s closure, announced a budget of £30,000 for their own study: ‘Feasibility Study of the Pool Complex’. A study that would be put out to tender and would take two months to complete. In June 2001 the multinational company EDAW in association with Page and Park Architects were appointed to do the Council’s study. In January 2002, almost a year



later, EDAW confirmed to SSAC they had delivered their report to Glasgow City Council. SSAC asked to see copies of this study but were told that there were some technical problems with it. SSAC already had problems with just how well EDAW had consulted local people: questionnaires had been found lying in closes, community sessions and discussion groups were cancelled because Glasgow City Council said they would be hijacked by SSAC members. The Council finally published its study in late June 2002. The EDAW/Park&Page report concluded that the Govanhill Pool should be developed into a centre which uses the two small pools and redevelops the main pool into a healthy living centre, it included the proposed funders for the project which would cost £3.5 million.

The report was given to the ‘Southside Regeneration Group’: a local group made up of representatives of the housing associations, voluntary groups and heads of local schools. No one is quite sure what the criteria is to be represented within the group and SSAC had lobbied long and hard to get involved without success. The ‘Southside Regeneration Group’ appointed a sub-committee to examine the legitimacy of the Council’s feasibility study’s figures as they appeared not to stack up. It was to the credit of this sub-committee that a representative of SSAC was invited to become a member. It was agreed at meeting, that an independent consultant should be called in to examine the figures. A further £7,000 of public money was given for the task. The consultant Archie Fairley was appointed in August 2002. In his interim report in November 2002, Fairley reported that he had contacted the various funders suggested by EDAW/Park&Page and found that they had not actually been consulted, and that the £3.5 million which they suggested for the regeneration of the pool was wildly off the mark. He estimated that there was in fact an outside chance of being able to raise £1.2 million, and that would be on the basis of half of that being “matched” by those bidding for finance. His formal conclusion in his final report states: “The main conclusion of the report is that the indicative capital funding package in the EDAW/Park&Page report is not well founded and is not feasible under current or foreseeable circumstances...” He concluded at the meeting that: “My own professional standard would not have allowed me to put my signature to such a Study.”

So in December 2003, a year and a half after the feasibility study was commissioned by Glasgow City Council, it turns out not to be not worth the paper it’s written on. Many users of the Govanhill Pool and most community members had from the beginning believed that the Council’s feasibility study commissioned after the pool was closed was a “whitewash” and a cynical ploy by

Charlie Gordon and the Council to buy time whilst the protest died down. But SSAC have not gone away! Most of SSAC’s time recently has been taken up by the process described above and by court cases ‘relating’ to their campaign. On the night that the campaigners were violently evicted by Strathclyde Police,

many ordinary men, women and children were physically and psychologically injured. SSAC called for a full public inquiry into the behaviour of Strathclyde Police. This was refused but an “independent” inquiry was set up. This involved

the investigation of Strathclyde Police by Fife Police, the Chief Constable of which was until three years ago the Assistant Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police. On the night of the eviction no charges were brought against any members of SSAC. However, in January 2002 after the report by Fife Police was given to the Procurator Fiscal, nine people—all members of SSAC, seven of which are Muslim—were charged with various offences relating to the night of the eviction. SSAC made eighteen complaints about Strathclyde Police behaviour to the Fife Police Inquiry, twelve of these have been abandoned and six are under review by the Procurator Fiscal. SSAC don't believe that the six under review will go any further until all the court cases against SSAC members have been heard.

'South Side Against Closure' have now been in existence for almost two years. They are fighting for local democracy, for their voices to be heard. They have lost all faith in local Councillors who are meant to be in power to represent them. Councillors are furiously rubbishing the survey SSAC carried out and accuse them of wanting to hijack council tax money for their own ends. It is obvious to anyone who has come in contact with this campaign that rather than taking from the community they continue to give: their time, their expertise as individuals, their intellect and creativity. At the time in Glasgow when there was demonstrations against the murder of Firsat Yildiz Dag, a Kurdish refugee—where demonstrators had to run a gauntlet of local white youths and adults in Sighthill—across the city Asian youth, white housewives and children, elderly Asian men, shopkeepers and professionals were all coming together to fight for their community.

SSAC meet every Monday evening, for more information on their continuing campaign see: www.saveourpool.co.uk

Notes

- 1 In fact it transpired that the Council made this decision in October 2000 and told no-one. Local Labour Councillors although aware of the proposed closure simply kept quiet. No assistance was given to the community or users to argue a case against closure and the only "offer" was to relocate and "direct" users to "state of the art" pools 3 and 4 miles away.
- 2 A questionnaire was piloted extensively in the community in order to be sure the questions were both appropriate to the task and technically viable. As a result community members themselves made suggestions and assisted in the development of the instrument and study design. Every attempt was made to ensure that the questions allowed all views to be expressed from the wide range of community members. There emerged a strong view that the questionnaire should be administered on a face to face basis so that an opportunity could be given to respondents to explain or expand on their views as they addressed specific questions. A team of local people involved in the campaign were given training in face to face interviewing in order to ensure rigour and consistency.
3. State of the art pools are being built with European and government money and through SportScotland government money. SportScotland has given £21.5 million to Glasgow for sport and recreation facilities. It has produced major statements about the need to regenerate communities and implement social inclusion strategies—in association with the Scottish Executive, the documents 'The Role of Sport in Regenerating Deprived Communities', and what it calls "the settled will" of the Scottish people in a document called 'Sport 21'. Both are replete with statements about social inclusion, health, recreation and sport.

The Glasgow strategy of closing old pools and building new ones (with SportScotland money) has ignored the advice and recommendations of its funders. For example the document above states clearly: "All providers should evaluate cur-

rent programmes and the extent to which they are addressing all aspects of social inclusion." In the case of the Govanhill Pool closure Glasgow City Council has not done this. The council did not conduct a social audit as to the consequences of closure. It ignored all of the research evidence about the need to keep local and recreational sports facilities open particularly in urban areas in a context of social inclusion. It can be easily demonstrated that the action to close runs counter to the Council's own policies, SportScotlands' targets on social inclusion, those of the Scottish and Westminster Parliament's. Guidelines and recent research on local community consultation from the Scottish Parliament's Executive have been ignored.

Out for the Night
(continued from page 26)

of wrongful imprisonment. After the first year in prison he stated that the person becomes accustomed to prison life and therefore it becomes easier for them. For this reason he introduced a sliding scale downwards for each year spent in prison thereafter. Calcutt retired two days after he submitted his report, he never met Paddy Hill, his lawyer or Dr. Grounds. MOJO believe that the Calcutt report will become a precedent, setting the agenda for future compensation claims. It took the Birmingham Six eleven years after their release to finally receive full compensation based on Calcutt's sliding scale. So for somebody like the recently released Robert Brown, who spent twenty-five years innocent in prison, he will get very little for his final year inside because life had become so easy for him... and who knows how many years it will take him to get it?

Sir David Calcutt's findings are in stark contrast to those of Dr. Adrian Grounds', an expert in the field.

MOJO want to set up a halfway house for people who have suffered miscarriages of justice so that when they are released they have somewhere to go: somewhere they can get support from people who have suffered in similar ways, counselling, a place of rehabilitation, a place that their families can use as well. They also want to set up a monitoring group. Most people would see this as an obvious step but this initiative comes from those who have suffered, not those in power. It will be a long hard struggle for MOJO to raise the necessary funds to create such a place. John McManus believes that those who hold the purse strings know exactly what's going on but don't want to admit the legal system is not perfect. In contrast, the people on the street know that nothing is perfect, that mistakes are always made. Even within the MOJO organisation mistakes will be made but he hopes that they will be open and honest enough to admit them. This is something that the judicial system and the government have not so far been willing to do. If they did they would be funding an organisation like MOJO and would see them as a checks and balance to the judicial system. MOJO are not saying that *all* police, lawyers and judges are bent. What they are saying is there *are* corrupt police, lawyers and judges and that they shouldn't be in the positions of power that they are. The whole idea of the judicial system, the government and the media playing down the significance of all the miscarriages of justice over the last ten years is to allay public fear. They want to assure us that there are no serious problems with the police and the judicial system. Yet, survey after survey show that people don't trust the police because there is plainly one law for them and one law for us. For MOJO this just can't go on. It divides society more and more and causes more and more misery. The prison population in the UK is growing at an accelerated rate and therefore there is bound to be an increase in miscarriages of justice. The 'Criminal

4. Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space Ltd.
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"GLAS are a Glasgow based co-operative of architects, teachers, writers and urban activists who are committed to fighting all manifestations of socio-spatial inequality, exploitation and deprivation." They produce the magazine GlasPaper.
5. Making Waves, 23rd-4th March 2002, Langside Halls, Glasgow

Two day community conference reflecting the impact campaigns can make locally and globally.

Case Review Commission' have already had over four thousand cases lodged with them to date.

Ideally MOJO will get public funds to set up their halfway house. At the moment they are fighting innocent people's cases and raising public awareness. They have clear ideas of how their organisation should take shape. They have charitable status and have a management committee formed of individuals with backgrounds in the legal system, human rights, and those who have suffered miscarriages of justice themselves. As the organisation grows they are aware of potential problems. Both John McManus and Paddy Hill may want to take a step back in the future. They want to put safeguards within the organisation so that it doesn't become a 'toothless tiger'; they want to ensure an equality in pay where the maximum wage that any employee can receive is that of the skilled worker's wage; they want to offer students in relevant fields such as law, journalism, psychology, double the minimum wage to work part-time; they want to make sure no one individual can bring in their own agenda to the detriment of the organisation and/or the people they are fighting for and supporting. They will continue to raise awareness and money by organising fund raising events, receiving donations, and putting on cultural events like the 'Out for the Night' benefits. One project recently initiated involves the Glasgow based artist Michael Fullerton. Paddy Hill approached Michael with the view to purchasing his painting of Lady Cosgrove, the first female judge in Scotland, exhibited in his MFA exhibition at Tramway earlier this year. Michael felt it inappropriate for this painting to be hung in the MOJO office so they decided that he would paint portraits of people who had suffered miscarriages of justice. Michael met Robert Brown before his release and photographed Robert, his mother and his aunts; he also photographed T.C. Campbell and Paddy Hill. The artist is currently working on these full-length portraits that will also reference particular Gainsborough paintings. It is intended that these paintings will be auctioned to raise money for MOJO.

If you're a DJ, actor, musician, artist and would like to get involved with a MOJO project or if you're involved in law, psychiatry, journalism, documentary making or web design and would like to volunteer your services, then get in touch with:

John McManus
Miscarriages of Justice Organisation (Scotland)
G.M.A.C. 3rd Floor 34 Albion St.
Glasgow, G1 1LH

Tel. 0141 564 1245
mojoscotland@mac.com

Notes

1. 'Indictment: Trial by Fire', T.C. Campbell and Reg MCKay, Canongate; 'Forever Lost, Forever Gone', Paddy Joe Hill Published, Bloomsbury; 'The Star Rover', Jack London, Canongate (Rebel Inc.).

Cube culture:

Exploding the frames of cinema in Bristol

Ben Slater

After four years, Bristol's Cube, one of precious few full-time cinemas and arts venues in the UK with a claim to the term 'Independence', is flourishing. Former Cube programmer Ben Slater explores its development and talks to some of the core team.

Amidst much argument about the beleaguered independent film exhibition in the UK, 'art-house' cinemas continue to dominate both the funding hand-outs and the policy documents. But as the multiplexes aggressively seek to widen their audiences (securing exclusive runs on foreign-language hits, teaming up with the British Film Institute), there is a real case to be made that the future of alternative film exhibition lies not within the cosy confines of regional film theatre, but in new kinds of cinema spaces. Resisting easy definition, these are places where the traditional frames and expectations of a film venue are subverted, adapted and re-invigorated.

These creative impulses go back as far as avant-garde cabaret in the 1920s, from there into the free-form art movements of the '60s, resurfacing in rave and club culture and further. In the context of Britain in the '90s and beyond, the will to 'explode cinema' has mainly come from groups of like-minded film makers frustrated not only by the feature-film bias of mainstream exhibition, but the often stifling, formal atmosphere of presentation. They wanted to create their own space, not usually fixed to one venue, but nomadic, unpredictable. Crucially, they demanded the freedom to screen work without it having to pass through the networks, channels and barriers that centrally govern our culture.

In London in the mid '90s, alternative cinema collectives definitely seemed to have their moment. *Halloween Film Society*, *My Eyes My Eyes*, *Omsk*, *Exploding Cinema*, *Kinokaze* and more. They operated with little or no funding, they took risks and they memorably heckled TV executives at panels about 'independence' during the London Film Festival. Although the frequency of events seemed to be dwindling by the late '90s, their intentions still reverberated.

Club Rombus, a film screening collective based in Bristol circa 1997 had specialised in intermittently putting live music to film in unusual and audacious contexts. I'd heard they had simultaneously projected both Murnau and Herzog's versions of *Nosferatu* side-by-side in an act of vampiric experimentation. This led me to attend what for them must have been a fairly 'straight' night involving an uncut 16mm print of Borowczyk's juicy *La Bete*, a DJ and a very smoky community centre. Later I experienced a far more momentous *Rombus* event, a band called *The Newts* performing soundtracks to animations by the Russian master Starewicz, after-hours, in a small, but much-loved second-run cinema called *The Arts Centre*. This half-hidden venue, located down the end of a scruffy corridor past a Chinese restaurant, had long ago been Bristol's main centre for the arts, and its inviting auditorium with red velvet seating remained virtually unchanged.

Nobody that night had an inkling that within 18 months, the husband and wife team who had run the cinema for over a decade would disappear suddenly, leaving a trail of debt, and allowing the lease to get snatched up by the least likely 'cultural entrepreneurs' in Bristol. Kevin Dennis and Hogge (erstwhile circus stilt-walkers and the main organisers of *Club Rombus*) joined up with an ambitious film maker, Jack Davies and local film net-worker and screenwriter Julian Holman, to form the key team that would kickstart *The Cube*

Cinema into existence.

Collectively they dreamed of the old *Arts Centre* transformed into a venue that could move freely between the current second-run programme, cult classics, new indies and the kind of mixed-media events that had made *Rombus* so exciting. None of the London collectives ran a venue, even the Brighton *Cinematheque* with its excellent film programme hires out a private screening room. For good reasons most people wouldn't want to get bogged down with property law and overheads—but for the Bristol group, the freedom and rewards of having a venue to call your own were potentially massive.

In October 1998, after six draining months of meetings, fund-raising and cleaning-up, the *Arts Centre* re-opened under the name *The Cube* with a screening of Chris Petit's 1979 London-to-Bristol road-movie *Radio On*. The energy had gone West. The doors were open.

As the team soon discovered, organising monthly events in ad-hoc spaces is a very different game from running a venue seven days a week. Audiences went up and down, but mostly down. A pattern began to establish itself, one-off events might sell-out, but any attempt at a normal film-run led only to a trickle.

In the initial business plan, it was envisaged that the regular films would subsidise more ambitious events, but the proliferation of commercial screens in Bristol plus the presence of two well-established art-house venues (*Watershed* and *Arnolfini*) had virtually eroded the second-run market (hence the cinema's original closure). Only a few key films could transcend this (*Buena Vista Social Club*, *Amores Perros*, *Crouching Tiger*, et al). There was no clearly reliable source of income. After continued fruitless attempts to chase the art-house mainstream *The Cube* was finally liberated by that failure. Now it could experiment and take the wildest chances, because there was nothing to lose.

It was an uphill struggle for the best part of a year. It went voluntary (and continues to be) after only a few months. When it became painfully obvious that it couldn't afford wages it returned to what it had always been—a labour of pure love, passion and enthusiasm.

Gradually *The Cube* shaped up. Licenses to sell booze (and drink it in the cinema) and to stage live music eventually came and opened up myriad possibilities. Donated computer equipment revolutionised the office into a hub of Linux-biased online creativity. Part and full-time volunteers began to gather into an experienced and friendly workforce. Diverse audiences were brought into the building, crossing between the farthest reaches of the program. No matter how underground and alternative *The Cube* might have felt, it always made everyone through the doors welcome—to come in, hang out and get involved.

Bands and DJ's played, sometimes to old films, new films, their own films or no films. People gave talks, workshops, readings, discussions. Events turned into parties and vice versa. *The Cube* was still a cinema, but its programme exploded in many different directions. Film was the base-



Billy Childish at The Cube

camp. The rest was up for grabs.

In August 2001 a fire in the corridor outside the venue forced its sudden closure. Just as the momentum was really building, when word of its activities was seriously beginning to filter out of the West Country to the rest of the UK and beyond, a hefty dose of bad luck put everything on hold.

A more difficult period of closure followed. They were back to bureaucracy—lawyers, landlords, insurers and builders. Men in suits and hard hats were their visitors.

The core team had changed considerably since '98. Jack, Julian and Kevin had all departed, none acrimoniously, but *The Cube* is dangerously all-consuming. You had to make a clean break or you would struggle to have any life outside of it. Among others, Hogge had been joined by Chris 'Chiz' Williams, a London music industry drop-out self-exiled to Bristol, and sometime e-zine editor and artist 'The Lady' Lucy, both of whom have an unwavering and somewhat delirious commitment to the venue's success.

After they had given up announcing predicted opening dates because of seemingly endless delays, the new entrance finally swung open to a refurbished *Cube* in August 2002. It's not been long since the re-opening as I write, but the audience-levels are healthy, and the programme itself is, if anything, more wildly diverse, eclectic and genuinely exciting than before. Cult music acts rub shoulders with cult films, anti-war activist nights, art exhibitions, film-makers introducing their work and much assorted *Cube*-flavoured mayhem.

What the future holds for *The Cube* has never been certain. Given the levels of energy required to turn events around and keep things on track it has always been impossible for the organisation to think much further than a month ahead. *The Cube* has never chased the kind of long-term public funding that could finance its infrastructure. To make the leap from a voluntary organisation to a salaried workplace is difficult to contemplate for a number of pragmatic and psychological reasons. But actually there aren't any arts funding schemes for places like *The Cube* to sign up to, and there seems to be no will to create them. While struggling regional film theatres are forced to spend

fortunes on branding consultants and months drawing up applications for emergency grants, just so they can keep bringing you the latest Loach and Kiarostami (and I'm certainly not knocking that), *The Cube* continues to re-invent the possibilities of a cinema venue every week on a shoestring. That's the cost of freedom.

An email conversation with Chiz, Lucy and Hogge of *The Cube*

Ben Slater: Initially, the primary objective and ethos of *The Cube* was to be an alternative cinema. Since then 'Cinema' for *The Cube* has become the basis for a much wider range of activities. Tell me about this development, the factors and thinking behind that?

Chiz: This building has been used for Cinema—alternative, arty, small and independent—for 30 years. It has been run by co-ops, a family business, arts-funded bodies and used by musicians, fine-artists, pornographers, video makers, poets and drama companies... most exploiting the Cinema set-up to their own ends.

The concept behind *Cube* programming has, to me, always been based around an idea of cinema as a cultural centre. The diversity of our programme has developed with gaining legal licenses and the continuous exploration and development of our cinema space. It is strengthened and developed by a strong sense of the history/future of projected visual images but chiefly due to the enormous interests of the revolving *Cube* team. It's a more broadly "Cinematic" programme—we can now entertain multi-format screenings, talks, live music, computer workshops and theatre in the same month all twisted around a backbone of films.

Although we reject a lot of possible programme content, we try a lot of ideas out of curiosity and the need to bring in the money as well as to constantly re-define what *The Cube* is about. The growth of activities within the space over the last 4 years has been fast and furious and there is a daily discussion about this: to keep on experimenting but to remain recognisably and unfathomably *The Cube Cinema*.

Hogge: It was always in my mind that many kinds

of stage- or screen-based activities would be possible because of the nature of the physical set-up. Early on we were working with the established practice of the site, namely cinema, so as to keep as much of the loyal audience as possible and to acclimatise ourselves with the new environment. I don't think we have lost our focus on films, but we have shifted so much into other types of events.

BS: What's your relationship with the funded 'independent' cinemas and art-spaces? Has it changed since you began?

C: I have become less envious of funded Cinemas. They sometimes work in worse conditions and with little creative input from the staff, and are just as unstable. However, I visit some venues that have a more consistent, steady income-stream and still wish we could achieve this, but feel it best to avoid core funding and develop new ways that will allow us to support ourselves.

The way we work off other independent cinemas' more locked programmes is by working on the fly, turning around ideas into actual practice very quickly, leaving us able to respond to current tastes and events with speed. Likewise we collaborate with them by sharing films and ideas, often proving there is a substantial audience for marginal subject matter. Our mutant cinema team is often brought in to programme and assist funded film spaces to provide a live cinematic event, to re-work their ideas of cinema.

BS: Is there a danger that once it becomes a free-for-all, that the programme loses coherence, too many hybrid events splits the audience? I'm interested to hear you talk about your audiences.

C: I think most of us have a strong perception of what *The Cube* programme is. It tries to pick up and programme what people may have missed out on, is ignored by other cinemas/media, or needs quietly celebrating.

People are not as constrained as some people like to think. I remember an argument that went "we should show no normal films" (i.e. those held by a regular distributor) because the more marginal/cult film/video received bigger crowds and it was not politically correct (to show the 'normal' films). However the same activists and artists that came to the marginal stuff would come to see *Crouching Tiger* or *Buena Vista Social Club*. People enjoy our diversity as much as we do.

Lucy: I like the comparison to fanzines... to think of *The Cube* as a live cinema fanzine with some of the volunteers being contributing editors. We have a strong idea of what the programme is. Though I think this is too sub-conscious sometimes, not discussed enough.

H: I'm not sure anyone knows how coherency (in the programme) is actually achieved, if indeed it is. A recent volunteer said she liked the programme because of its apparent absence of coherency; as if in this was a sheer openness and range which could at any point turn into something specific and specialised. Careful examination of early programmes will show terrible programming experiments, but those were necessary to learn. I'd say we had only just reached a plateau in smoothing out content-coherency-contexts and then the fire happened.

Also, something in the nature of *The Cube* has helped form a cult following. Partly due to it being run by people on the dole who can be reached and talked to about ideas and anything, but mainly because the programme speaks a kind of colloquial street language, which says that people are having fun while contributing to the culture. In this respect it's entirely true that the people organising events are engineering their own entertainment. I always hated it when an event wasn't attended by the originator of the idea—which seems fanatical now. I felt very personally about the ownership of ideas.

C: We need to achieve higher audiences though and that will be the next challenge but I don't think it will simply come by showing successfully 'popular' material. We are very much a commercial venture. If we don't achieve the audience figures and income we need to sustain the operation we will have to close. Pre-fire our audience figures were up. An audience had found us and more



importantly we had developed a (varied) audience. We have become more popular and more diverse.

H: Part of this development is probing and seeing what people will and won't come to. It's interesting to imagine that much more experimentation is yet to come. For lots of people *The Cube* is a discovery...

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The Project meets The Office: Managerialism in UK Plc.

Paul Taylor

I adore certain symbols no less than you do. But it would be absurd to sacrifice to the symbol the reality that it symbolises. Cathedrals are to be adored until the day when, to preserve them, it would be necessary to deny the truths which they teach.

Time Regained, Marcel Proust

The above quotation from Proust relates to a conversation about the threat to French cathedrals posed by the German bombing raids of the First World War. Substituting the word ‘Universities’ for ‘Cathedrals’ makes it a particularly vivid description of the way in which Higher Education in Britain is in danger of becoming a pastiche of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge some of us would still like to believe it should be. The university system is now but one area of British institutional life that is rife with a level of one-dimensional thought that makes satire increasingly difficult. When Powerpoint presenters use cabalistic incantations consisting of one part alliteration and one part bullet point you begin to ask ‘how do you satirise what is already a self-parody?’ It is in such a context that Ricky Gervais has created the squirm-inducing and zeitgeist-capturing character of David Brent in the BBC’s cult mocu-drama *The Office*. Unfortunately, amidst the laughter and squirming, teachers, doctors, university lecturers etc. recognise that for every David Brent there are many more equally vapid but ultimately much more dangerous characters I term *managerial operators*. Another recent BBC programme *The Project* has shown how this much more malign form of managerialism has successfully eviscerated traditional Labour Party values and the point of this article is to highlight how it is now committing similar harm upon our universities and the few remaining areas of British life where people are not yet contract workers for UK Plc.

Humboldt’s Rift—the Taliban with spreadsheets

The University of Culture, instituted by Humboldt, draws its legitimacy from culture, which names the synthesis of teaching and research, process and product, history and reason, philology and criticism, historical scholarship and aesthetic experience, the institution and the individual.

Readings 1996: 65

The phenomenon I am describing, strictly speaking, neither managerial nor ethical, but a hybrid (and sterile) vampire that draws what strength it has from that most dangerous of combinations, two concealed metaphors—both in themselves relatively harmless—but which together form a deadly compound whose corollaries include not just the crude idea that education should serve the needs of the labour market, but also underlie the whole moral rationale behind the push for accountability and testing. Managerial ethics is not so much a theory as a set of sloppy and unquestioned assumptions.

Prickett 2002: 181

Our modern university system largely derives from the model instituted by Wilhem von Humboldt (1767-1835), a Prussian Minister of Education, at the University of Berlin. It is based upon the German idealist notion of the University of Culture and the concept of *Bildung*—the ennoblement of character. Such concepts were obviously of their time but they nevertheless provide a useful yardstick with which to gauge how far from such ideals British universities have moved. Universities are succumbing to a tsunami of rampant managerialism that has already devastated the morale of previously public sector institutions

such as the BBC and the NHS. The time is fast approaching, if it hasn’t already arrived, when we will be telling our children about the times when students weren’t ‘customers’ or ‘key-stakeholders’ but...well, students.

An interesting by-product of devolution is the way in which Scottish resistance to top-up fees may be one of the last barriers to the whole-scale commercialisation of British universities. This is a danger that has until now largely crept under the radar of a middle-England driven media more concerned with the latest A-Level debacle. If Scottish universities successfully resist top-up fees the fraught situation will arise whereby they will become disproportionately cheap to English students and the likely subsequent invasion will make the Edinburgh Festival’s usual quota of coruroys and striped shirts seem small eighty-shilling. Beyond this obvious concern, however, is the even more important issue of where in society is there any space left for thinking beyond the bottom-line mentality of the spreadsheet?

The phrases *managerialism* and *managerial ethics* are used in this piece as shorthand concepts with which to explore the anti-professional, anti-intellectual, and disturbingly uber-Thatcherite values that have all but destroyed Humboldt’s vision. Since I am writing as an academic, the majority of my examples are taken from higher education but I would argue that this particular arena of contemporary managerialism is worth paying attention to for a number of reasons:

- Whist the Ivory Tower may seem divorced from the ‘real world’ concerns of many people, the very fact that this relatively isolated and protected cultural realm has become infected by the managerial virus bodes ill for the rest of society’s chances of resisting it.
- Since universities inevitably train the country’s future leaders, administrators, and technocrats, the pervasion of the educational process by managerialist values has potentially profound political implications for the future of Britain.
- The spread of managerialism within higher education provides a particularly vivid example of the ‘Emperor’s got no clothes’ type of collective psychosis that can be achieved by the strategic use of inherently banal but nevertheless extremely destructive concepts. The fact that professional academics, trained to deconstruct and reflect upon the ways in which power is exercised, have failed to call managerialism’s bluff is particularly worrying and again cause for concern.

The totally administered society

...current higher education culture, the purpose of which...is to make ‘balance-sheets sound like Homer and Homer sound like balance-sheets’ ...British higher education policy now turns solely on the enforced internalisation of managerial control mechanisms. Their intention is to displace universalising intellectual comportment by task-orientated technocratic procedures through behavioural conditioning; to make the experience of thinking and learning the sterilized aggregate of specified technical norms.

Davies 1996: 23

First voiced in the 1960s Marcuse’s fears of a totally regimented and administered society are more and more evident to anyone that has had to deal with a large organisation whether it be a hospital or a bank manager hiding behind a defensive ring of Korean-based call centres. In the field of education, job advertisements vividly illustrate the dominance of managerial values. The text accompanying a call for university administrators



universities are succumbing to a rampant managerialism that has already devastated the morale of previously public sector institutions

at a Scottish university, for example, includes educational values only as an after-thought: “You will need strong management skills, particularly an understanding of change management, a commitment to customer-focused service and an empathy for academic objectives.”¹ The complete conflation of academic and business values is reflected in another advert’s juxtaposition with chief executive positions in the water, gas and development agency fields and its call for a “Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive.” Again, academic values play a minor role in the tenor of the advert but do threaten to be implied (albeit in a heavily commercially qualified sense) in the penultimate phrase of its final sentence: “The successful candidate will possess strategic vision, commercial acumen, and a strong determination to lead a team that has very high ambitions for the future. This is an exciting opportunity to lead a large, distinctive, and dynamic organisation that thrives on developing entrepreneurial learning and encouraging innovation.”²

Such examples are now found across the whole range of the educational field. Thus, the Department for Education and Skills (sic) recently launched a national press advertising campaign for ‘fast-track Teaching’ in secondary schools. Fresh on the heels of various railway debacles, not only the accompanying logo, but also the advertisement’s whole ethos, bore more than a passing resemblance to Railtrack with an almost heroic insensitivity to the danger of negative comparisons being drawn. It read: “Fast Track teachers embrace new technology, new business practice, new management skills, and new school policies.” Although reminiscent of the Catholic Mass’s Apostolic Creed, the Department is at least open in its calling for management apparatchiks, rather than educators with a vocation. Disturbing as they are, to some extent these adverts are just surface phenomenon. Deeper within education, however, structural changes are being instigated that are likely to have much longer term and damaging effects upon the ability of educators to think beyond the spreadsheet. Thus, in a manner the Rev. Sun Myung Moon would doubtless approve of:

Aspiring headteachers are to be required to take a compulsory leadership qualification before they can apply to run schools...The New National College for School Leadership is based in a state-of-the-art £28m headquarters on Nottingham University’s Jubilee campus...It will encourage all classroom staff, not just heads and their deputies, to see themselves as leaders and to take up appropriate training.³

The seamless conflation of the managerial and education sectors is further illustrated within the same report by the news that: “Sir Anthony Greener, deputy chairman of BT and chairman of the firm operating the government-sponsored learndirect adult education provider, was appointed interim chairman of the qualifications and cur-

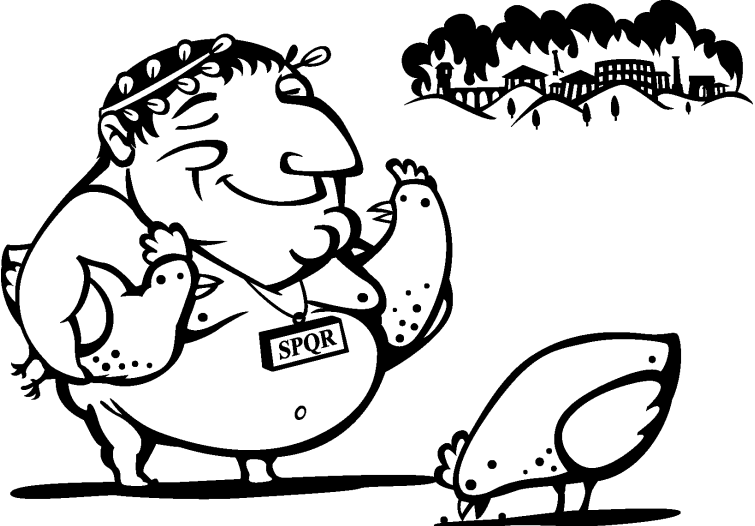
riculum authority.” As Marcuse points out: “Domination is transfigured into administration...the tangible source of exploitation disappears behind the facade of objective rationality.”
Marcuse 1968: 32

Flower power & the potted plants brigade

One of Mrs Thatcher’s most outstanding gifts was the ability to effect a brilliant interweaving of power and language into a form of communication with which no communication was possible...Thatcherism was distinctive for the originality and effectiveness of its manner of communicating:like an adept schizogene,it gave the impression of participating in a communicative exchange, when in reality the messages were all one-way.
Ryan 2002: 118 & 120

...there are those of us working in the area of education who see the social project underway as destructive of values that are essential to our practices and indeed to the very fabric of our moral and social lives.
Loughlin 2002: 105

On occasion, jaw-dropping ironies such as the sponsorship of a medical ethics centre by a tobac-



the competitive market ethos of managerialism stops at the free & open discussion of competing views of managerial competencies themselves

co company mean that the writing on the wall can not be fully hidden by the latest laminated corporate mission statement. More often, however, the negative effects of the corporate influence are accretional and cumulative and pass without sustained critique. Moral distance from the vandalism of managerial ethics is created by a combination of rhetorical and physical constructions. Thus, although the etymological root of manager is the Latin word for hand (manus),potted plants, abstract art, deep carpets, and other managerial paraphernalia act as a semiotic break between managerial units and hands-on ‘core businesses’ (whether it be teaching, doctoring etc.). In addition to these physical signs, less material but ultimately much more significant barriers are built up by managerial units through the essentially vague and platitudinous language and symbols they use: “...the greasy idiom of the profiteers.” (Steiner 2001: 222)
I once witnessed a student hustings where the Labour-sponsored candidate put down the trademark question-without-apparent-end of a Socialist Worker member with the quip: “If I wanted to sell newspapers I’d have joined John Menzies.” To this day I regret not having shouted out: “Then if you wanted to sell red roses,why didn’t you join Interflora?”New Labour’s logoised version of flower power is a good example of the ‘greasy idiom’. Allied with suitably banal managerial language about customers and stake-holders,principled opposition ironically becomes difficult

exactly because there are no firmly held principles to engage with and the constant use of catchy sound-bites makes us increasingly insensitive to their inherent crassness.Ultimately unjustifiable and illogical parallels between dissimilar concepts and values are sustained by mere repetition: “...it is a perfectly routine and rather frequent equivalence that implicitly carries...a message.” (Fairclough 2000: 27) ‘The power of the platitude’ is used as a Trojan Mouse for managerial values that are propagated by the attritional effect euphemism has on more substantive values less amenable to translation into managerialese.
The promiscuous use of euphemisms, neologisms, and the skilful slipping into arguments of questionable, yet generally unquestioned, equivalences are key elements of the managerial approach to engineering change. In the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao undermined traditional values by, amongst other tactics, ‘simplifying’ a huge swathe of pre-existing Mandarin ideograms. This included, quite poignantly, excising a heart shape from the symbol for ‘love’. In the university sector, rather than excision, the linguistic heart of education has become furred up with a corporate Esperanto that has effectively redefined meanings and associations to preclude discussions based upon professional academic values. Despite their acronyms conjuring up unthreatening images of supermarkets and fizzy drinks (for example, The Higher Education Staff Development Agency [HESDA] and the Further Education National Training Organisation [FENTO]), the language used by various education bodies has destructive effects that are intrinsically difficult to engage with.
Managerialism uses phrases: “from a language which is itself the destruction of thought...This style is not only inadequate, but a kind of virus rendering blank the minds that try to use it.” (Maskell & Robinson 2001:62) The danger is more than aesthetic: “such pressures on the incipience of meaning and communication in the individual and collective subconscious, on the means of articulate speech,are gradual.” (Steiner 2001: 8) As in the blurring of the pigs and humans in the conclusion of *Animal Farm*, it is only near its end point, and when it is too late to change things that one tends to see how cumulative pressure creates qualitative change.
Chase the indicator & Who will audit the auditors?
The risk of audit is not simply that it does not work and leads to fatal remedies, although one can assemble evidence for this. Rather, it is that, in the process of continuous movement and reform that it generates, it is also impossible to know when it is justified and effective...audit has put itself beyond empirical knowledge about its own effects in favour of a constant programmatic affirmation of its potential.
Powers 1997: 142
The practical consequence of the spread of managerial language is that substantive political discourse based upon ethical judgements and values becomes subordinate to the mestastic growth of league tables and performance indicators as more and more areas of public life join in a game of “chase the indicator.”⁴ In a classic case of ‘the emperor has no clothes’, however, the competitive market ethos of managerialism stops at the free and open discussion of competing views of managerial competencies themselves. Powers (1997) provides a detailed analysis of how much managerial activity becomes self-validating and legitimising. It rarely seems to be pointed out that managerial ethics do not work by any meaningful measures of success. ‘Meaningful’ is obviously a highly disputable term. I define it as the situation whereby outputs can be judged in terms that have a basis beyond the very system that produced them. This practical criticism of managerial ethics is thus grounded on the fact it has no substantive outputs beyond its own frame of reference. This is the tactical sleight of hand that makes the audit culture within our schools,universities, and hospitals so difficult to refute rationally. The double irony of the success of politically motivated audit-

ing is that it presents itself as apolitical and is premised upon its own lack of accountability. On the third level of the ironic tier, attempts to point out the ironies are met with the claim that one is being ‘unrealistic’.
The inability of managerialism to provide demonstrable evidence of its own success leads to an attempt to make everything part of its frame. Its hitherto successful strategy seems to be that if it is in a state of constant movement no one will notice its fatal flaw (as if in a glass-topped carriage the naked emperor hurtles past too quickly for his nudity to be proved). This produces an educational variant of the economic theory known as Gresham’s law which states that bad money drives out good. Thus, the number of First Class degrees awarded by universities is used as a performance measurement in university league tables, yet politicians disingenuously express indignation if anyone has the temerity to highlight the subsequently perfectly logical market-driven tendency of universities to increase their number of Firsts to improve their marketability. As A-Level students have recently found out to their cost, ‘quality’ becomes an actuarial category to be manipulated rather than actually achieved.
The meta-irony of managerialism is that, like politicians criticising firefighters as completely unrealistic when they are only claiming pay increases of the same percentage as the politicians have awarded themselves (and in absolute terms much, much,less), the proponents of managerialism are seemingly immune to measurement themselves. This can be seen by the following examples of managerial expansion without concomitant results:
The NHS—in the first 5 years of NHS reforms (1989-1994): administrative staff increased by 18,000 whilst nursing staff fell by 27,000.
The BBC—seven years of Lord Birt’s reforms led to a doubling of management with 26% of staff being managers.
The National Audit Office—a ten-fold increase in expenditure on ‘management consultancy services’ between 1987-8 and 1995-6.
(see Protherough & Pick 2002: 16–17)
As Charlton (2002) points out, in the private sector the need for profitability works as a natural brake upon the managerial function, within non-commercial environments such as the universities, however, the only limit to managerial expansion appears to be the depth of academics’ gullibility.
The myths of managerialism and the great transferable skills swindle
...the mechanical abstractions of managerialism do not merely distort,butactually come to replace the evidence of the senses within the managerial world.
Protherough & Pick 2002: 45
Any skills...are so called just because they can’t be transferred. Learn how to mend your car engine and you will also learn how to work out the difference between stress and beat in English sixteenth-century metrics. As one trying to do both I assure you that neither gives any assistance at all with the other.
Maskell & Robinson 2001: 79
As we have already seen with the potted-plants syndrome, one of the ironies of the business world is that despite its hard-nosed ‘real-world’ rhetoric it frequently tends to be much more divorced from reality than the tallest ivory tower. Managerialism suffers from the same type of institutionalised irrationality that has historically accompanied the market system. From the tulip fever of 1630s Amsterdam⁵ and the South Sea bubble of the 1720s to the dot.com collapse of more recent times, myths,rhetoric, and plain wishful thinking dominate the managerialist mind-set to produce inefficient,counter-productive and at times surreal results. Thus, despite the rhetoric of the knowledge economy as a key rationale for the expansion of higher education, the majority of managerial policies serve to undermine the very qualities of ingenuity and creativity one would think are necessary to be internationally competitive in the new global economic order. This much-vaunted

concept actually serves to disguise the fact that, despite its nominal ‘real-world’ focus, it actually squeezes out useful knowledge. A true understanding of real,complex situations is neglected in favour of the abstract information it has prepared in large quantities to fit its pre-existing and ultimately stultifying models, business plans, and spreadsheets.

The negative consequences of this displacement of knowledge by managerial information are reflected in the misguided strategies it produces. Ryan (2002) cogently describes how, since Margaret Thatcher, successive British governments have engaged in a project of pressuring the university sector to train future employees rather than generally creative and well-rounded citizens. He points out that this has been informed by the mentality of a Taylorist manufacturing-based outlook just when there has been a paradigm shift towards a postindustrial world that will require those generally well-educated students rather than trained workers whose specific skills become quickly dated. At one point in this process he describes how: “The dawning realisation that epochal transformations in the constitutional fabric were being made by people who were assertively ignorant of the absolute basics of what they were dealing with was, to this writer, cause for great perplexity.” (Ryan 2002: 129) Put more bluntly, even within the narrowly utilitarian appreciation of education the managerial approach has missed UK Plc.’s urgently needed strategic targets with an amnesiac’s sense of timing and the marksmanship of Mr Magoo.

The recent history of UK Plc. provides a particular cautionary tale for those eager to promote the mythical concept of transferable skills throughout Higher Education. Managers have indeed succeeded in transferring their skills across a range of industrial and public sector organisations with great alacrity and corresponding financial reward but without the corollary of easily identifiable gains. Gerald Corbett of Railtrack was formerly the head of a hotel group before he attempted to transfer his managerial ‘skills’ to the railways and despite the ensuing debacle walked away from the Railtrack with a golden handshake worth more than one million pounds.Continuing the trend Lord Birt, formerly of the BBC, has also managed to use his experience of a large media organisation to become an advisor on transport policy...need I elaborate?

This myth of transferable skills lies behind the rise of managers as the new Jacobins. They promote the basic category error of conflating such fundamentally different activities as education and training and seek to reduce the status of the former to the latter. If any readers do doubt their innate difference then think about the different parental responses that would accompany a child’s announcement upon returning home to announce that they had received either sex education or sex training at school. Training is undoubtedly an important part of any advanced economy, but the overwhelming supremacy of its terms in education today is steadily eroding away any basis from which the managerial approach can be criticised. If we all accept that we’re trainees rather than educated people then the path to power of the managerial cadres is unobstructed. Academics and the rest of the population interested in the values of education shoot themselves in the foot when they allow the managerial terminology of training to enter education: “Education, in proportion as it becomes particular, ceases to be education.” Maskell & Robinson 2001: 29)

If you tell a lie ...make sure it’s a big one

...the selling of audit has not taken place modestly: audit is a practice which in every sphere where it operates mustnecessarily talk up expectations at the very same time as it may suffer from so doing...the‘expectations gap’ is not so much a problem for auditing as its constitutive principle. More generally, the audit explosion has actually closed off avenues of official scepticism and modesty...

Power 1997: 144

The ability of managerialism to prevent the vari-

ous internal contradictions identified above from being scrutinised more forcefully is based upon a combination of two closely related factors that draw upon the rhetorical ploys delineated earlier: The strategic use of banal platitudes.

The deliberate over-extension of metaphorical constructions—metaphor fatigue.

Applying auditing’s own penchant for measurement to managerial practices highlights blatant anomalies that threaten to test the elastic properties of managerial euphemisms to snapping point. The inherent contradiction of the audit principle that Power highlights above is that despite being an activity premised upon accurate measurement, it nevertheless has an inherent need to exaggerate its ability to make such measurements so that its own performance is immune from such assessment. This is part of the process we have previously seen identified as audit’s need for constant movement and it tends to take the form of assertions of its potential rather than actual evidence of its efficacy. This ruse to distract from closer scrutiny seems based upon a combination of two parallel strategies:

The expansion of auditing into more and more inappropriate areas of society’s activities.

Building upon this ubiquity of audit and a large number of people’s complicity in it to make claims so large that the stakes are raised for anyone who wishes to point out the sheer irrationality of the situation (the silence of the crowd in the face of the emperor’s nudity).

The result within education of this strategy of distraction from auditing’s self-examination is the creation of bad faith and double standards of which Estelle Morris was an unfortunate embodiment. Under the Government’s political slogan of ‘Education,Education, Education’ this former Secretary of State for Education took more than one attempt to gain seven O-Levels and then failed all her A-Levels including the largely preparation-free multiple choice test of General Studies.⁶ More than just a gibe at a Minister’s intellectual ability this goes straight to the issue of the way in which managerial ethics depends upon an uneven application of the ‘quality’ it promotes. An unwillingness to question fundamentally the intellectual credibility of both the dogma and its proponents lies behind the ability of managerialism to superimpose itself over the professional standards of not just academics, but also such groups as over-managed doctors (see Loughlin 2002) and creative sectors of the BBC. Professional practices are supplanted by the values of intellectually inferior, parasitical, but strategically more adept operators. Managerial ideas need to be opposed on not only intellectual grounds but within their own terms where the internal contradictions identified above are blatant and therefore of most embarrassment to these operators.

Conclusion

...the total mobilization of all media for the defense of the established reality has coordinated the means of expression to the point where communication of transcending contents becomes technically impossible. The spectre that has haunted the artistic consciousness since Mallarme—the impossibility of speaking a non-reified language, of communicating the negative—has ceased to be a spectre. It has materialized.

Marcuse 1968: 68

That *The Office* does in fact accurately describe a real social phenomenon was neatly illustrated in a surreal recent Whitehall event where the pop music impresario Pete Waterman lectured top Civil Service Mandarins on how to identify and nurture new talent. In an incident much can be learnt from: “One bewildered civil servant is alleged to have asked aloud: ‘Mr Waterman,why are you here?’”⁷ Managerial ethics are irredeemably vapid and tautologous but, by both sins of omission and commission, workers, voters and citizens across UK Plc. greatly enhance the managerial vandals’ destructive power. We need to imitate the anonymous civil servant and show a similar level of basic incredulity, and a subsequent willingness to challenge the managerial Emperor’s

nudity. It is perhaps our last thin defence against all becoming like characters from either *The Office* or *The Project*. Mind you, in The Office David Brent got sacked, in UK Plc. he’ll probably end up designing our transport policy...

Notes

1. University of Edinburgh job advert for 3 School Administrators,THES 20.9.02 pg47.
2. Advert in the *Sunday Times’ Appointments* section, 20.10.2002, pg1.
3. “Teachers wanting to be head face leadership course”,Rebecca Smithers and Lucy Ward, *The Guardian*, 24.10.2002,p7.
4. A phrase used in a THES letter by Roderick Martin and cited in Ryan (2002:128)
5. For a fictional portrayal of this period see Deborah Moggach’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Vintage Books)
6. A journalistic critique of this situation is provided in “*Do A-Levels matter? Not in politics*” Catherine Bennett *Guardian G2 Section* 29.11.01 pg 5—with a similar sentiment evident in an under graduate student’s perspective on Ms Morris’s reaction to the A-Level fixing scandal of Sept 2002: “ The expression on Estelle Morris’s face on the front page of yesterday’s *Daily Telegraph* looked hauntingly familiar. It is exactly the same expression as I wore last year, when,on opening my last A-Level French exam paper, I realised that it was beyond my limited capabilities. (*The Daily Telegraph* letters page 21.09.02)
7. ‘Fool Britannia’ Alexis Petridis Thursday August 1, 2002 *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

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Contact details on page 3

This Year’s Module

Peter Suchin

Duke Maskell and Ian Robinson,
The New Idea of a University,
Haven Books, 2001
ISBN 1-903660-00-9
hb: £18.50

“Education is an important key...but the good life’s never won by degrees...” —so sang Bryan Ferry in 1973, himself the holder of a Fine Art degree from the University of Newcastle.¹ This provocative theme of what may or may not be achieved by university graduates is one of the issues taken up in Duke Maskell and Ian Robinson’s *The New Idea of the University*, a timely critique of the Labour Party’s reinscription of the role, meaning and ideological framework of the British university. In chapters focusing upon “The Economic Case for Higher Education”, “The Old Idea of the University”, “The New University for Life”, and “Levering Up Standards or Top-Down Drivel”, Maskell and Robinson systematically consider recent changes within higher education, providing what is clearly a polemic against what they see as the government’s out-and-out attack on the universities and their long-held moral and intellectual place within British culture.

“The word “university””, write Maskell and Robinson, “has a history which makes some things almost impossible to say, for example that the university should be for all, or for job-training, or to make us rich.” (P. 65). Later in their book they observe:

“Scholars are traditionally poor; which is not ideal, but it is positively a bad thing for them to become fat cats, or to expect to be courted by company boards looking for rising entrepreneurs. The educated ought to have a reasonable chance of a comfortable life in the clerisy, but not to expect a direct link between a degree and the creation of wealth.” (P. 183)

But that which it is “almost impossible to say” about the university has today become not merely “possible” but a new orthodoxy, one spouted at every turn, both by apologists for the transformation of the universities into profit-driven businesses, and for those who demand an allegedly democratic increase in student numbers, a matter linked to the widening of university access to those who have been excluded in the past. The university’s substantial history as a place in which critical and individual thought has been encouraged and protected from the whims of the marketplace has been, as the authors of this book make clear, pulverised into invisibility, obscured by the smoke-screens of profit and mock democratic access for all. In the “New University” emphasis is placed for the most part upon the supposedly profitable, utilitarian features of taking up a degree course place. For the Labour Party and its supporters, suggest Maskell and Robinson, “...education is an investment. Education is the same as training; education is useful; education will make us rich.” (P. 4)

Quite aside from their abhorrence at the way university managers and “the modern career academic” (p. 41) have taken to this new model of what it is that universities should be about, the authors of this book rightly attend to the absurdity of such claims, mapping out in their opening chapter just how pathetically untrue, and indeed just how scientifically unsound is the argument, proposed by government-sponsored economists, that “profitability” and a university education automatically correspond. “How can we know”,

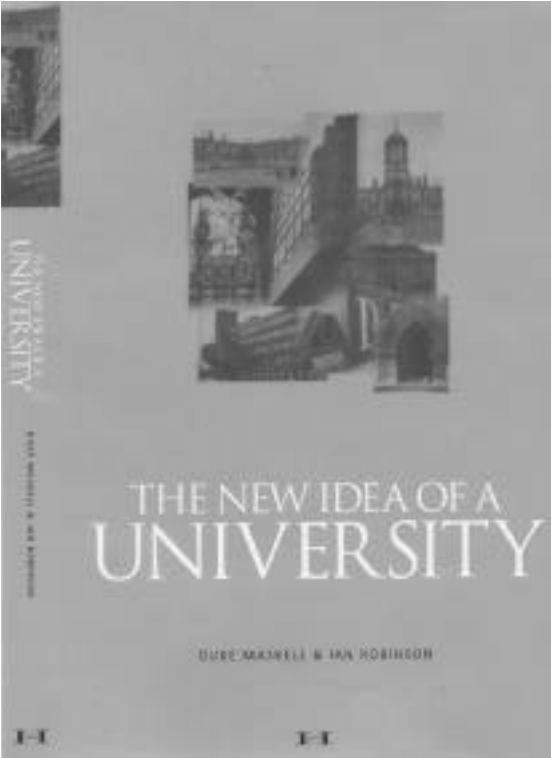
they ask, “whether education makes people more productive or not? We can’t. We just don’t know in any such way as economists understand knowledge. But we invest billions every year on the assumption that we can and do know, all the same.” (P. 16)

Maskell and Robinson take issue with the very notion that the universities need to be expanded at all, irrespective of any arguments revolving around ideas of access for those who have been hitherto excluded:

“The entire state-subsidized expansion of higher education, maintained by so many governments over so many years, with no semblance of justification offered for it that isn’t economic, has been, it seems, a tremendous error, economically. And if the subsidies were withdrawn, the grotesquely bloated system they have created would shrink back to something that made economic (and educational) sense. The so-called customers would be found simply not to exist and the so-called need for this so-called education would vanish with them. In its present shape and size the whole thing is simply a creation of wastefulness.” (P. 13)

In the closing pages of the book it is suggested that what should in part replace university expansion is a return to some form of technical training, a reinstating of the polytechnics, funded in large measure by those businesses who would wish their future employees be “trained”—which is not to be confused with “educated”—in specific job-related skills and abilities. This distinction between education and training is markedly present throughout the volume. Maskell and Robinson do not sneer at the notion of employment-related training, rather they emphasise that education is a very different thing to the learning of skills necessary to the carrying out of specific technical tasks.

The question of the relationship between the university and truth surfaces at several points. Presenting the university as a place in which critical thought is to be assiduously encouraged, Maskell and Robinson emphasise that education should connect with life in general rather than just to one’s career, and teaching should take place in a way that extends discussion well beyond the narrow confines of a given academic subject. They go so far as to state that “teaching” is in fact too problematic a term for this exchange, linking this word to the new situation in which students are expected to regurgitate, in exams or essays, particular facts transmitted in “courses” or “modules”, a means of information transmission that can be easily policed by government examining boards. Citing at length the works of J. H. Newman and of Jane Austen, Maskell and Robinson propose that these writers’ ideas on education offer an important, desirable model of how education should take place and of what it means to be educated, as opposed to trained. “Jane Austen”, they point out, “consistently, systematically, presents the instructed mentality as the opposite of the educated, and the reception of instruction as one way of not being educated at all.” (P. 39). Whilst citing such figures fits perfectly well with the general critical thrust of *The New Idea of the University*, Maskell and Robinson’s respect for “English Literature” is sometimes a little too intense, as though close attention to this subject were the sole means of saving the university from itself. The expression “common sense” is also used throughout the book as though it were an unloaded term, though it might easily be used



by government ministers to defend their radical restructuring of higher education. After all, in our increasingly commodified culture it can too easily appear “right and proper” that one should pay for one’s education.

This idea is, however, another government-speak cliché that is held up to scrutiny by Maskell and Robinson, as is the whole apparatus of the New University: the extracting of huge fees from students and their parents, the interminable quality inspections, the churning out of more and more pieces of so-called “research” designed solely with money-generation in mind, the proliferation of managers with their ugly, insensitive, self-serving ideas about turning universities into profitable business ventures. These and other pernicious features of the university as it presently stands or is trying to become are all spelt out in *The New Idea of the University* and taken to task with much pertinent and constructive argument.

This book should be taken seriously by those who determine the fate of the university, including staff, students and potential students, as well as those ministers and administrators who have been influential in carrying out the immense restructuring of recent years. To reverse the process that has ruined what were once, whatever their problems and contradictions, important centres of intellect and invention will not be easy. As Maskell and Robinson all too convincingly indicate, “The real crisis in British education is not at the bottom, amongst an underclass, but at the top, amongst those in charge.” (P. 144)

Notes

1. Bryan Ferry, “Street Life”, included on the Roxy Music LP/CD Stranded, EG Records, 1973.

Tired of the Soup du Jour?

Some Problems with ‘New Formalism’

Nick Evans

‘Early one Morning’, Whitechapel Gallery’s 2002 summer exhibition featured work by the artists Jim Lambie, Eva Rothschild, Shahin Afrabassi, Gary Webb and Clare Barclay. The exhibition was hailed by Whitechapel director Iwona Blazwick in its catalogue introduction as a “paradigm shift in contemporary art.” The work of these featured artists, along with Roger Hiorns and an American contingent including Jason Meadows, has been identified by the writer and artist JJ Charlesworth as representing “a new kind of sculpture.”

So what is all the fuss about? Fortunately the answer lies close at hand. In his recent articles in Art Monthly and Artext,¹ Charlesworth provides a tentative critical bedrock on which to build the promotional machine for the ‘new paradigm’. These articles chart the recent historical conditions within the (mainly) British art world, which gave rise to this “new formalism”. They also provide a generic overview of the concerns and tendencies which unite the disparate strands of a dozen or so individual practices.

Whilst accepting the broad thrust of Charlesworth’s analysis of the recent historical conditions within British art, I wish to look more closely at a number of his assertions regarding the necessary conditions for the ascendance of the new formalism. I wish to outline the way the artistic co-concerns within new formalism, identified by both Iwona Blazwick and Charlesworth, often rely on problematic systems of representation. I also wish to highlight Charlesworth’s apparently benign acceptance of the evacuation of critical content from the contemporary art gallery.

First, a summery of the historic trajectory behind the new formalism, as outlined by Charlesworth: Charlesworth identifies the return to abandoned realms of ‘60s formalism as a phenomenon that flies in the face of recent practice that deals with issues of social, political, institutional and cultural representation. The abandonment of critical discourse in the late 1980s is a result of an impasse reached when the expanded field of critical discourse found itself limited through its integration into institutional norms. The institutional norms came out on top, as critical perspectives were assimilated into gallery modes of presentation. This led to a deepening disillusionment on the part of artists since no one could quite decide how to deal with the problems of institutional assimilation they were facing. Into the breach leapt the yBas, who couldn’t really care less, just accepted the conservative norms, and indulged themselves and their audience with anti-critical, populist modes of production. This in turn was great for the art market, which mushroomed. The consequent expansion of the British art scene allowed previously marginalised critical perspectives, with art-works often sited outwith the gallery, to be integrated into the mainstream. (Charlesworth cites Landy’s *Breakdown* and Dellar’s *Battle of Orgreave* as examples.)

This is all very well, provided one disregards all those ‘alternative’ practices which continued to work outwith the mainstream, enacting strategies which paved the way for the eventual ‘acceptance’ of Dellar or Landy. Charlesworth’s proposal suggests that the continuing marginalisation of seminal figures active prior to the yBa generation, such as Terry Atkinson, is due to the continuing and inevitable historic repercussions of the

critical/institutional ‘impasse’ reached as a result of the integration of ‘80s critical discourse into the institutional mainstream. This is untrue, far from passively accepting their marginalisation, artists such as Atkinson worked, and continue to work, to avoid such assimilation. Charlesworth’s acceptance of a supposed impasse is convenient for his historical thesis, allowing him to accept simulachral spectacles such as *Breakdown* and the *Battle of Orgreave* as examples of the re-integration of “marginal radical perspectives.” He bolsters their status as the ‘critical voice’ of the ‘radical academy’, affirming the position of Dellar and Landy within it.

Charlesworth correctly identifies the shift in values which has enabled the cultural hegemony to expand in line with the increasing professionalisation, careerism and commercialisation of the artworld, leading to the integration of previously marginal interdisciplinary forms. However, blithely accepting works such as *The Battle of Orgreave* or *Breakdown* as paragons of contemporary critical practice is expedient. He uses these examples as a form of rhetoric, allowing himself the room to present the emergence of the new formalist ‘paradigm’ as an ‘inevitable’ response to his defeatist thesis. This thesis proposes that the move towards ‘abstraction’ amongst a younger generation is a natural progression of the late ‘90s commitment towards material preoccupations: “the reinvention of popular or amateur idioms, the return of the handmade and of the craft aesthetic.” The gallery becomes the site for the ‘abstract’, formalist paradigm: it represents one of many possible ‘products’ available to the cultural consumer. Although Charlesworth recognises the new formalism as “pragmatic and often cynical...and conservatively reconciled to the commercial locus of the unique object”, he justifies the importance of the position it represents on the grounds that it is “one of the plurality of practices in which questions of form, experience and context may once again be negotiated.”

The implications of adopting a position such as this are ultimately limiting. It entails a casual shrugging off of the retreat of political content from the gallery, and an acceptance of a limited field of engagement as Charlesworth disengages contemporary practices’ formalist concerns from other areas in the “plurality of practice.” This is presented as a re-investment in the formal conditions of arts’ presentation, but its effect is to close down the gallery as a site for the more important matter of allowing artists to discuss, head on, the contextual terms of their works’ presentation. Accepting the gallery as one of a number of sites

Why is it that whilst the world outside spirals in ever tighter circles of terror and repression, artists retreat further into a hermetic world of abstraction, formalism, deferred meanings and latent spiritualism?



within a pluralised field of cultural activity is all very well, but limiting the effectiveness of the gallery to the celebration of formal conditions is not. This is especially important when the conditions are presented as being beyond analysis or contestation:

“The shape these [formal] resolutions take may appear to reiterate earlier terms, but they do so only in as much as they articulate the contemporary aesthetic and institutional possibilities and limitations of gallery art – the ambiguity towards reference and representation, the hallucinatory excess of material form and the syntax that develops between elements once they are placed in relation to one another – all echo the past but are discovered because these aspects are *default values*, so to speak, the *pragmatic reality* that was once mistaken for an essential.” (Emphasis added.)

This sounds remarkably close to the philosopher Richard Rorty’s position, with his brand of neo-pragmatist anti-philosophy, and it further exposes a kind of cultural determinism. The values are default and the reality pragmatic only through a given work’s dependence on code signals recognisable between class and knowledge sectors, and reflecting the power and influence of a predominantly middle class, art school educated cognoscenti. The “possibilities and limitations” of gallery art identified here are a depressing invocation of the status quo.

The works of the new formalists themselves do the most to undermine Charlesworth’s claim that the new formalism has moved on from the preoccupations of previous paradigms. Whilst they generally rely on tropes and systems of representation that are coded to appeal to the cognoscenti, and they are undoubtedly reconciled to and reliant on their gallery context, it is clear that the new formalists *do* embrace an institutional critique of sorts. Their critique may not be based on dry ‘80s conceptualism but it nonetheless relies on double coding in an attempt to undermine and parody itself. Rothschild’s piece *Early Learning* takes the tropes of New Generation sculptor Philip King and conflates these with articles reminiscent of children’s toys. Jim Lambie’s renowned floor piece

Eva Rothschild, *Early Learning*, 2002; ‘Not Neo but New’, Art Monthly no. 259, September 2002

Zobop is reminiscent of hard edged abstraction, yet its form is dictated by the constraints of the gallery space in which it is located. This pushes it into the realms of a 'critical regionalism', a critique of the international style and the 'non-place'. These strategies are however, hardly paradigm shifting and they do little to support Charlesworth's claims that the new formalism has "no ancestry to be traced" nor that it is being "constructed from the ground up, in a landscape uncluttered by the relics of history."

Charlesworth claims that the growth in use of handicrafts or idiosyncratic manufacture through the late '90s led to a new generation "representing a particular kind of investment" in art making, and this, along with the idea that craftwork will make the artwork more "authentic and resistant to a depersonalised and media saturated culture", revels in a kind of bourgeois primitivism. In fact this tendency towards primitivism is borne out in much of the work by the artists identified by Charlesworth. We can observe the use of neo-primitive identifiers such as "extremes of combinatory invention"² in the work of Gary Webb, an attraction for "ancient images and artefacts"³ in the work of Roger Hiorns or Clare Barclay, and a "[p]alaeolithic sensibility of shamanic magic"⁴ in Lambie's psychedelic soul sticks. Such references are surely quite deliberate; the titling works such as Meadow's Bald Eagle after an animal totem (and the symbol of the U.S), or Hiorns, Barclay and Rothschild's use of crystals and other new age paraphernalia indicate a knowing appropriation of the problematic signs of earlier shamanistic art practices and an understanding of new age culture and shamanism as practiced in broader culture. The use of such loaded signifiers (with a few notable exceptions) does not necessarily imply a critique of the appropriation of exotic imagery. Neither is the appropriation entirely naïve. It is more as if the use of such signs allows the artists to summon up a notion of the artworld as a 'totemistic' community, where through the process of an art education and shared sets of cultural and class values, artists and art lovers may develop a kinship between all things in the 'artworld-cosmos'. The acceptance and repeated use of visual stereotypes to communicate with like minds becomes sentimental cliché; a nod towards difference which affirms the new formalists' position within the status quo. In the end these strategies seem to function better as attempts to bolster the artworld's self image. They reaffirm and uncritically extend its codes, further reifying itself as 'cool' and hermetic, thereby placing the broader issues of representation it inadvertently (or sometimes advertently) raises beyond concern.

Unfortunately, like previous neo-primitive practices, the new formalism relies heavily and for the most part uncritically on a notional 'other' in order to generate value. The 'others' in this case range from the assumed values ascribed to a piece of leather which allow it to slip between signifying a state of nature or a sex fetish, to the desire to render art ('represented' through the tropes of '60s formalism) into the realms of a supposedly more authentic field of visceral experience via pop music or culture. Iwona Blazwick, writing in the catalogue introduction to 'Early One Morning', maintains that the use of a car body shop that is frequented by pop stars to finish the surface of a Webb sculpture gives the artwork 'appropriateness'. It presumably then relates to a more authentic (working class and/or pop cultural) setting, a garage on Old Kent Road.

The 'others' appropriated as signifying mecha-



nisms by the 'New Sculpture', however, do not hold a dialectical position within the work. The 'other' has become integrated into the work's field of signification to the extent that it is in fact presented as 'the same' but, in the words of Hal Foster, "erupts into the field of the same as difference."⁵ Thus, for example, Jason Meadows can combine the:

"possibilities of the abstract formalist paradigm with an anti-transcendent attitude to the ordinariness of materials and the everyday accessibility of representational elements [in this case Spider Man and basketball hoops]. Yet rather than being set in critical opposition these different perspectives are brought into collaboration."⁶

This 'mixing' of high and low culture does not really raise the artistic stakes for any emerging 'paradigm'. Neither does the holding up of such a futile 'collaboration' as a model practice on Charlesworth's part encourage any hopes for a more politically engaged or intellectually stimulating gallery practice in the near future. 'Mixing' high and low culture in this way can seem liberatory when one assumes that the cultural values being confronted rest on pure notions of identity and stark oppositions. Playing with high and low culture has long been a given strategy within the visual arts. Far from representing a paradigm shift such collaborations between high and low culture taken at face value, without critical interpretation, are in danger of backing the new formalism into an artistically predictable, politically reactionary cul-de-sac.

Charlesworth is sensitive to such criticism. But he maintains that the strategies adopted by the new formalists enable them to embrace idiosyncratic ways of working which could be seen as an "assertion of cultural separation or independence by the artist." He places the blame for potential readings of his position as reactionary and market-oriented firmly in a historical court. He claims that the historic failings of formalism have tended to be based not only upon an idealisation of form, but on a mystification of the contexts and conditions of gallery presentation. Charlesworth is quick however, to reassure us that it would be an impossibility for the new formalism to repeat this mistake. Unlike its precursor, the new formalism relies on "practical accident" rather than a "rationalised appeal to an ideal" and therefore "reveals" the conditions of its presentation:

"What [the new formalism] reveals, by practical accident rather than the rationalised appeal to an ideal, are the actual conditions of presentation that formalism sought to mystify as essential to the object, rather than the context of its presentation."

Even if we forgive Charlesworth the absurd proposition that the new formalists are busy generating "practical accidents" in order to reveal the context of their works' presentation, it is clear that the confines of gallery context have nevertheless become a precondition for the smooth running of the new formalist mechanics. 1960s formalism slipped into a mystification (tantamount to an outright denial) of the institutional politics of the

Shahin Afrassiabi, *Display with Table*, 2002; 'Not Neo but New', Art Monthly no. 259, September 2002

gallery; this is not so different from the new formalism's reliance upon the entrenchment of the unchallenged gallery as a necessity for the survival of the work in the first place. This entrenchment makes it increasingly hard to think adversarially about the gallery from within its four walls, and seems to preclude the making of a work which 'bites the hand that feeds it'. Worse, in becoming an apologist for the new formalist paradigm, Charlesworth seems to quickly accept and benignly anticipate the evacuation of *any* critical content from the gallery context.

Iwona Blazwick (again in her catalogue introduction to *Early One Morning*) claims that the works in the exhibition "trigger associations of pleasure and pain which go beyond language."⁷ This seems to suggest that, counter to Charlesworth's claims, the new formalism is far from a retreat from ideals. This contradiction is an outcome perhaps of Charlesworth's privileging the new formalism's place in an art historical lineage over an attempt to deliver us first-hand analysis of the works in question. When the actual work is discussed we tend to get readings that err close to mystification.

Thus the new formalism is described as possessing a visceral ability to universalise experience. Blazwick describes Lambie's work as having a "sheer visual presence" which is able to "carry us out of the here and now and to transport us somewhere else."⁸ Charlesworth has written that Roger Hiorns' work "refuse[s] to speak...their sense...bound up in their function, in the very fact of their presence."⁹ These interpretations make a mockery of any common sense potential claimed for new formalism. Instead we see it carrying on abstraction's tradition of seeking affirmation through mysticism and maintaining the 20th century's love affair with the spiritual in art.

Max Kosloff wrote on Rothko that it is necessary to "find that lever of consciousness which will change a blank painted fabric into a glow perpetuating itself into the memory."¹⁰ The bringing to, and the perpetuation through commentary, of the notion of abstract art as the purveyor of a higher truth in a secular society is a necessary tool in the maintenance of market value:

"spiritual atmosphere as a surplus of indefinable uniqueness added to the materially unique abstract work of art – further enhances the work's commercial value and social status. Spirituality legitimatises the abstract works worldly success."¹¹

Spirituality not only legitimises an abstract work's success, it can also prevent too many conclusions being drawn from its systems of representation. This obfuscation is enhanced by Charlesworth's assertions that for Gary Webb the "final resolution of allusion and form [is] something to be actively fought against"¹², or that "Hiorns' use of materials emphasises the paradoxical power of non-reference to signify in new and unpredictable ways."¹³ In the catalogue accompanying 'Early one Morning' Clare Barclay's works are acknowledged as pertaining to environmental, sexual or gender issues, their relationship to these issues, however, remains "loose and ambiguous...partly as a result of the formal rather than literal level at which they are played out"¹⁴, whilst Eva Rothschild's fascination and healthy scepticism for new age mysticism is rendered "ambivalent."¹⁵

This inflation of the transitory nature of the signifier to an ideal blurs the distinctions between the practices of artists identified as sharing in the new formalist paradigm, and renders fundamental signifiatory possibilities within individual works

impotent. Charlesworth, however, posits the retreat into non-signification as a liberatory experience by heralding it as an acceptance on the part of young artists of the conditions imposed upon art making in the unassailable context of the commercial world of the art gallery. He claims that what this in effect leads to is an opening up of the possibilities for art making, forging a new path separate from the “critical and institutional dead end of the previous decade.”

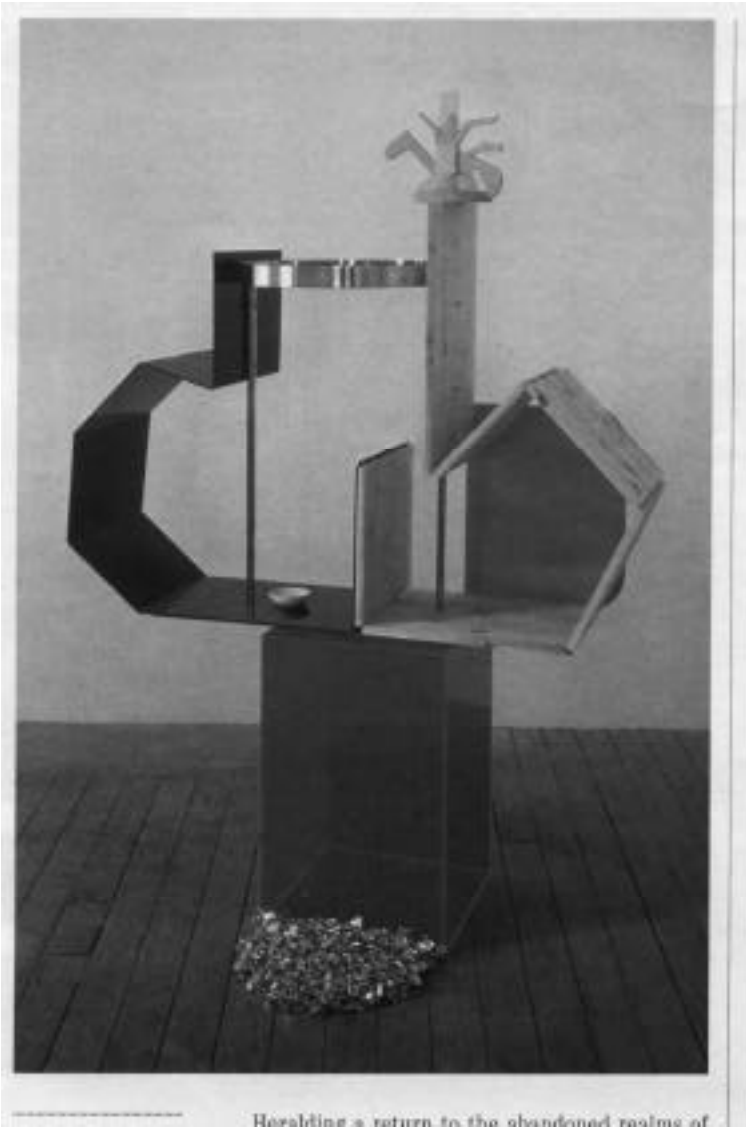
Unfortunately such a refusal on the part of artists to signify, or on the part of commentators to exploit the signifiatory potential that does exist within the work, plays heavily into the hands of the right-leaning political status quo. I do not argue here for a heckling, consciousness-raising work (although a bit of consciousness-raising would not go amiss). But the new formalism and its commentators need to be aware of its language of signification, especially when there are class, gender and race issues involved. Emptying out the negotiation of obvious class or racial assumptions within the work in favour of the play of signifiers or aesthetic and formal matters consolidates these assumptions whilst reassuring cognoscenti of their ‘right’ to adopt exotic stereotypes or make class representations without being challenged or self-critical. This can only further consolidate the already problematic hierarchies of consumption and representation within broader culture.

The argument for the new formalism Charlesworth pursues is highly historicised, and actually leaves little room for critical negotiation. It seems to propose an easy going assimilation of the ‘tropes’ of familiar postmodern paradigms (the mixing of high and low culture, an awareness of difference, a critique of pure form), and attempts to move on from these via the liberation of the signifier, embracing instead the realm of the poetic allusion and the reinvention of ‘popular’ and ‘amateur’ uses of materials and techniques. Charlesworth rightly praises the re-emergence within the new formalism of the discursive object, and the possibilities this raises for making “new meaning proceed from the presence of things.” He does not, however, adequately deal with the problematic nature of the meanings actually created. The only potential avenue for a critical reading within Charlesworth’s analysis relies on a passé critique of the conservatism of the radical academy, which absolves the need for the work to force the viewer to “think dialectically about cultural exclusion and the popular.”¹⁶ Instead, in favouring allusive interpretations Charlesworth seems to engage in a critique of metaphysics that seeks immunity from the possibility of being read as essentialist. This position reflects a nervousness on the part of new formalism; it does not want to be seen as overly ‘authorial’. It is as if by taking control of the meanings and implications of its signifiatory materials they will cast a totalitarian shadow over the author.

This slave-like adherence of the new formalism to its Derridean inheritance is frustrating. A paradigm shift suggests a new beginning; a moving on from a re-appraisal of what has come before, a sense of progressive engagement with the trinity of form, content and context. Instead what we seem to get with many of these loosely grouped new formalist works is a sense of retreat, a sense of taking comfort in the assumptions of the white cube, of re-invoking a host of nostalgic references from British ‘New Generation’ sculpture, through to retro-design/craft /pop-culture. Why is it that whilst the world outside spirals in ever tighter circles of terror and repression, and the potential

avenues of avoidance or resistance become squeezed by the growing dominance of capital and its civil and military bulldogs, artists retreat further into a hermetic world of abstraction, formalism, deferred meanings and latent spiritualism? Do artists really, as Charlesworth seems to propose, have no choice but to accept that the gallery is now fit solely for the exploration of formal issues? Are young artists really faced with a stark choice between the play of unlimited semiosis or the supposed dead-end street of late ‘80s critical discourse? That the world is a different place since 9/11 is a truism, but it could (and has) been argued that there is a need now, more than ever, for artists and writers to engage with the moral and ethical parameters of our globalising world. This is certainly not the time for a rehashing of single-issue driven ‘politically engaged’ practice. And we need to be wary of artists jumping uncritically on the bandwagon of the relational aesthetic. The social context of human interaction can be activated simply through the relationship between an art object and the viewer. It is not always necessary or important to foreground the events of everyday interaction in order to deal with the ‘social interactivity’ of art.

Instead of throwing the baby out with the bath water, and seeking to hive off political concerns ‘somewhere else’, free from the limitations of the gallery context or the autonomous object, we need to look at the means through which artists can make politically pertinent contributions in whatever field they are working in. This does not necessarily mean that abstraction is out and social realism is in. Such mutually exclusive dichotomies are long redundant. Instead we need to be investigating the potential for cultural representations that are open to the viewer, and seek to engage in a social debate. Socially concerned artists working directly through objects and painting need not (and cannot) be excluded. In fact, by accepting the limited frame of interaction inherent within the confines of a painting or sculpture, they may be uniquely placed to deepen the level, if not necessarily expand the parameters, of engagement with the viewer. Works which are genuinely critically engaging, that do not embrace subterfuge, will undoubtedly find breaching the walls of institutional gallery spaces difficult, if not impossible. But the institution is by no means the only ‘white space’ available to the artist. If it is possible for idiosyncratic formal experimentation to have a positive impact on critical discourse, then artists will have to invest time and effort in making gallery conditions (even ad-hoc ones) available to themselves and others. In seeking to reinvest in the critical potential of gallery based art, artists will be forced to acknowledge that coding within work remains an important, thorny, and inevitable part of visual representation. But we have to be careful not to restrict the nature of the coding to meet established expectations, be they the expectations of the cognoscenti, the market, historical reactionism, or peer group. Comfortable as it may be in the short term, culture simply cannot afford to restrict itself through a ‘knowing’ adherence to familiar tropes, it needs to be braver than that.



Notes

1. J Charlesworth, ‘Not Neo but New’, Art Monthly no. 259, September 2002 (from which all quotes are taken unless otherwise attributed) and JJ Charlesworth, Artext no. 78, Fall 2002.
2. Moffit p.62,
3. Lippard, ‘Overlay’, p.4
4. McEvilly, ‘Art in the Dark’, Artforum, 1983
5. Foster, ‘The Primitive Unconscious of Modern Art’, from ‘Art in Modern Culture’, p.207
6. Charlesworth in Artext No. 78, fall 2002
7. Iwona Blazwick, Catalogue introduction to ‘Early One Morning–New British Sculpture in the 21st Century’, Whitechapel Gallery, 2002.
8. Ibid
9. Charlesworth in Artext No.78, fall 2002
10. Kozloff, ‘Mark Rothko’, Renderings, 1969. Quoted by Kuspitt in ‘Concerning The Spiritual in Modern Art’, ‘The Spiritual in Art, Painting 1890-1985’, p.317
11. Kuspitt, in ‘The Spiritual in Art, Painting 1890-1985’, p.314
12. Artext no 78, fall 2002
13. Ibid
14. Andrea Tarsia, catalogue essay for ‘Early one Morning’, Whitechapel Gallery, 2002
15. Ibid
16. Roberts, ‘In Character’ from ‘Art and Language in Practice vol 2’ p.120.

Gary Webb, *Cock and Bull*, 2001; ‘Not Neo but New’, Art Monthly no. 259, September 2002

City of Culture: We mean it literally

John Gray

Two centuries ago Belfast's leading citizens declared that their town was 'the modern Athens'. When in 1985 Athens won the first contest to be official European City Capital of Culture, it was merely following in our self-declared footsteps! There has been something of the same over-weening pride in our now failed bid to formally become City Capital of Culture ourselves. Bookmakers placed us first, but Belfast citizens, well versed in the unreliability of horses, were increasingly unconvinced. In the end only *Imagine Belfast* and its immediate backers were 'shocked' when the judges failed to shortlist us.

Let's be fair. Although the City of Culture contest is now down to second ranking cities, Belfast had to leap enormous hurdles to get into contention. Our brief eighteenth century 'Age of Enlightenment' has long since vanished. It gave way to nineteenth and early twentieth century expansion fueled by devotion to 'God and Mammon', a period that still characterises the city's physical fabric – hence a city centre without a single building, save only the Linen Hall Library, devoted to cultural purposes. While on the one hand we have long been a byword for cultural conflict, there has been a consistent lack of commitment or investment in the more positive possibilities of culture and the arts. Much of the major infrastructure that any city requires, if it is to take these things seriously, is simply missing.

And yet in some measure the potential was there. *Stepping Stone: the Arts in Ulster* (Belfast, 2001) provided a useful survey of what was or what was not going on in the major arts disciplines on the eve of the bid. Poetry and drama were obvious strengths, but much was emerging elsewhere. The revival of the city centre from the early 1980s onwards has provided a toehold for a widening imaginative life, and an increasing range of mould breaking groups, constrained only by the pitiful level of public funding available to them.

Against this background, a Belfast bid, to have a chance of succeeding, had to offer a radical and transforming agenda, and needed a favourable following wind. The very title of the bid, 'One Belfast', implied an ambition for overarching change, albeit one that no other city would need to proclaim. The use on the title page of Tony Blair's phrase catching the moment of the Good Friday Agreement, 'Where hope and history rhyme', implied a bid building on the momentum of the agreement.

The most eye catching proposal was 'to live life without walls', which was to involve nothing less than the removal of the peace-lines. In the strange Belfast demotic developed for the bid, a kind of sub-Tom Paulin patois, the judges were assured, 'we mean what we say. We mean it literally. This is the City of Belfast shouting at you.' They didn't mean it though: even in the bid document we were told that a centre exploring the history of the Belfast conflict would be built at Conway Street (between the Falls and Shankill), but the surrounding peace line would remain in place. As those huddling under daily assault behind peace-lines voiced alarm, removal of peace lines became a vaguer aspiration.

During the short history of the bid, events, and more events, conspired to undermine one of its central thrusts. Executive crises were followed by Executive collapse, and rising governmental instability triggered protracted interface violence. How could we speak of 'One Belfast' while Unionists

refused to appoint a Deputy Mayor to serve under a Sinn Fein Lord Mayor? The favourable wind that the bid needed had turned into an adverse gale. On the morning of the bid's failure, as its advocates, in a final indignity, were evicted from a coffee bar because of a bomb scare, one prominent councillor blamed terrorists for the whole fiasco. It was more certainly a failure of politics.

Yet the credit for making the attempt, and credit it still must be, lies with Belfast City Council who initiated the idea. It is a pity that they and other prospective funders were unwilling to entrust the development of the bid to the creative forces already available in the cultural and arts sector. Of the 25 *Imagine Belfast* board members only two had any active connection with practice, and elsewhere the board was padded with representatives of bodies such as the *Tourist Board* and the *Northern Ireland Events Company*, bringing their own tarnished records with them.

In the event *Imagine Belfast* struggled with the crucial question asked of them: 'What do you understand by culture.' Perhaps it is an impossibly dangerous question in post cease-fire Belfast where culture has been a major focus of 'war by any other means'. The bid evaded definition, but proceeded by conflicting assertions. On the one hand, culture was overarching, about every aspect of life as we live it, and in particular a marker of 'citizenship', even if this was 'contentious as well as joyous'; and if you need to cherish culture in this context then you need to 'renew and restore tradition, custom and icon' – this, an essentially conservative perspective and one that does not challenge the emerging 'separate but equal' model for cultural development that all too many espouse. On the other hand they assured the judges that 'culture is for change', 'transformation', and 'transfiguring' even if they were unable to explain exactly how.

And just where did the arts fit into this? An early press statement was revealing: it spoke of 'recovering the whole city as a place of social, cultural and communal commerce', and went on; 'upon that vision depends every value that we might place on the arts themselves.' Thus the arts were denied any significance or enabling potential in their own right.

Certainly arts and cultural practitioners were consulted at an early stage, but any sense of ownership was lost by the time the bid emerged, and in a form that seemed merely bizarre to many. None would have disagreed with the need to address the issue of conflict, but most would have advised that the approach to the peace-lines issue was simply naive. Let us indeed create new possibilities for children as in the bid theme 'Through the eyes of a child', but why the heavy dependence on a new C.S. Lewis based centre? True, he was born here but the world of Narnia and its public school children does not obviously relate to the urban children of our here and now. A third strand of the bid, 'Made in Belfast', is a strange mixture offering 'Legendary Belfast', as though we are an ancient and mythic city (which we are not), but in fact providing prosaic enough routes into aspects of our history in a space age 2008 when we will not need the assistance of museums or libraries but, in a nightmare vision of the future, will access ATM-like 'legend points'. The Cathedral Quarter is at least a locale found in the real world, and its future as a cultural quarter is a further sub-theme, albeit headed by the cry, 'put the heart back into



the city', and they mean 'the very centre', when it is anything but. In the event the bid added little to existing and developer-led aspirations for the quarter.

And still we held our peace, and hoped that perhaps we had read the wrong pages, and that if Belfast was shortlisted there would be a chance to change the agenda. We had not allowed for the capacity of the main promoters of the bid to catastrophically damage the chances of what was their own venture. Apart from the formal visits of the judges, we may be sure that they had their ears to the ground in other ways. How was the bid gelling? They would not have had to listen too hard to hear the roars of anguish at a series of own goals. In January 2000 the Northern Ireland Arts Council's refusal of regeneration funding for the Grand Opera House, the Old Museum Arts Centre, and the Crescent Centre offered depressing evidence of the lack of available funding for critical infrastructure. Much worse was to follow.

Just as the bid was launched, Belfast's arts organisations discovered, via the City Council website, that they were going to suffer a 20% cut in core funding with immediate effect. The funds were still available but only via a new outreach approach working with partners in deprived inner city areas, and through mechanisms which are still unexplained. The immediate loss of direct funding plunged the entire sector into crisis and public protest, which was also backed by many of our expatriate luminaries who had already lent their names to the City of Culture bid. Apart from the immediate dislocation, there was growing concern that the new policy threatened a tribalisation of arts provision in the city, with single identity communities and councillors picking the arts they wanted. The 'One Belfast' slogan of the City of Culture bid was being by-passed with disastrous effect.

And now that we have lost, how do we pick up the pieces? The immediate reaction of those involved in *Imagine Belfast* – that they had got it right and the judges had got it wrong – is hardly encouraging. It is as though the captain of the Titanic, having hit the iceberg, ordered full steam ahead. The failure even to be shortlisted is the clearest possible signal that a sea change in thinking is required. Impoverished and beleaguered though the cultural and arts practitioners of the city are, they remain the key to ways out of our cultural impasse and to wider civic enablement. They should be given the chance and the resources to prove it.

ABOVE: Image from *Imagine Belfast* City of Culture Bid

